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# PARTISAN REVIEW

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER, 1954

LIONEL TRILLING
Mansfield Park

HERMANN HESSE
Two Stories

E. V. WALTER
Conservatism Recrudescent

V. S. PRITCHETT
Faulkner's Fable

FRANCIS FERGUSSON
The Theater and the Academy

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Riesman Considered

THOMAS GREENE
The Relevance of Lautréamont

Poems and reviews by Scott Bates, Patricia Coombs, Louis O. Coxe, Allen Mandelbaum, Henry Bamford Parkes, W. D. Snodgrass, Ernst Topitsch, J. G. Weightman

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## Hermann Hesse

# TWO STORIES

## DREAM JOURNEYS: A RECORD

He was a man who followed the not very highly regarded profession of popular writer but who belonged, nevertheless, to that smaller circle of authors who take their profession with the greatest seriousness and are honored by certain enthusiasts just as true poets used to be honored in earlier times when poets and poetry still existed. This man of letters wrote all sorts of pleasant things; he wrote novels, stories and even poems, and he took the greatest pains to do his work well. Seldom, however, did he succeed in satisfying his ambition, for he made the mistake, although he considered himself a modest man, of presumptuously comparing himself with and measuring himself against not his colleagues and contemporaries, the other writers of light literature, but the poets of the past—those, that is, who have survived for generations. And so, to his distress, he had to recognize again and again that the most successful page he had ever written still fell far short of the most wayward sentence or verse of those true poets. Thus he grew constantly more dispirited and lost all joy in his work, and if now and again he still wrote some trifle, he did so only to give vent and expression to this dissatisfaction and inner aridity in bitter criticism of his times and of himself, and naturally nothing was thereby improved. Sometimes, too, he tried to find his way back into the enchanted gardens of pure poetry and praised beauty in pretty word pictures, in which he paid conscientious tribute to Nature, Women and Friendship. These verses did in fact possess a certain music and some similarity to the true poetry of true poets, of which they reminded one in much the same way that a passing infatuation or flutter of the emotions may on occasion remind a business man or worldling of his lost soul.

One day in the season between winter and spring, this author,

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who would so dearly have loved to be a poet and was even taken for one by some people, was once again sitting at his desk. As usual he had got up late, not until nearly twelve, after having read half the night. Now he was sitting and staring at the place on the page where he had stopped writing the day before. There were clever things on that page, expressed in smooth and cultivated language, delicate conceits, artful descriptions; many a pretty rocket and star-shell rose from these lines and pages, many a tender sentiment found expression there—and yet the writer was disillusioned by what he read; sobered, he sat in front of what he had begun the preceding evening with a certain joy and enthusiasm, what for the space of an evening hour had looked like poetry and had now overnight simply turned into literature, into miserable scribbled pages that were really a shame.

And once again in this rather pitiful noonday hour he felt and pondered something he had already felt and pondered many times, namely the odd tragi-comedy of his position, the stupidity of his secret pretensions to true poetry (since after all in the real world of today true poetry did not exist and could not exist) and the childishness and silly futility of his efforts, prompted by his love of the old poetry and aided by his fine ear for the words of the true poets, to try to breed something that would be equivalent to true poetry or at any rate would look enough like it to be mistaken for it (since he knew quite well that from education and imitation nothing whatever can be bred.)

He was also partially aware that the hopeless striving and childish illusion of all his efforts were by no means an isolated and personal phenomenon, but that every man, even the apparently normal, even the apparently happy and successful, nourishes within himself exactly the same foolish and hopeless self-deception, that every man strives constantly and incessantly after something impossible, that even the most ill-favored carries within him the ideal of Adonis, the most stupid, the ideal of the sage, the poorest, the aspiration to be Croesus. Yes, he actually half knew that even the so greatly venerated ideal of "pure poetry" amounted to nothing, that Goethe had looked up to Homer and Shakespeare just as hopelessly as an author of today might perhaps look up to Goethe, and that the conception of "poet" was only a lovely abstraction, that even Homer and Shakespeare had been only men of letters, gifted specialists who

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had succeeded in giving their works an appearance of the impersonal and the eternal. He half knew all this in the way that clever men accustomed to ideas know these obvious and terrifying things. He even knew or surmised that some part of his own attempts at writing would perhaps impress the readers of a later time as "true poetry," that future men of letters would perhaps look back with yearning to him and to his times as though to a golden age in which real poets, real feelings, real human beings, a real nature and a real soul had still existed. The comfortable philistine of the Biedermeier period and the fat philistine of some small medieval city had, he knew, contrasted their own refined and decadent times in just the same critical and sentimental fashion with an innocent, naive, blessed yesterday and had regarded their own grandfathers and their way of life with just the same mixture of envy and sympathy with which the men of today regard the blessed time before the invention of the steam engine.

All these thoughts were familiar to the writer, all these truths were known to him. He knew: the same game, the same eager, noble, hopeless striving for something valid, enduring, valuable in itself, that impelled him to cover sheets of paper with words, actuated all others as well: the general, the ambassador, the senator, the woman of fashion, the merchant's apprentice. All human beings were striving in some fashion, however cleverly or stupidly, to transcend themselves and the possible, fired by secret desires, dazzled by models, enticed by ideals. No lieutenant who did not bear within him the idea of Napoleon—and no Napoleon who had not at times felt himself an ape, his triumphs false coins, his goals illusory. No one who had not joined in this dance. No one, either, who had not at some time, through some crevice, perceived the truth about this illusion. To be sure, there were some who were perfect, there were the men-gods, there was a Buddha, there was a Jesus, there was a Socrates. But even they were made perfect, were penetrated through and through by omniscience, only at a single instant, at the instant of their deaths. Indeed their deaths had been nothing but the last state of transfused understanding, the last, finally successful surrender. And conceivably every death had this significance, conceivably everyone at the point of death was at the point of perfection, having put aside the error of striving, having surrendered himself and no longer desiring to be.

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Thoughts of this sort, uncomplicated though they are, seriously disturb a man's efforts, his activity, the continued playing of the game. And so in this hour the work of the aspiring poet did not advance. There was no word worthy of being set down, there was no thought whose communication was really necessary. No, it was a pity to waste paper, better to leave it unmarked.

With this feeling, the writer put away his pen and pushed the sheets of paper into a drawer; had there been a fire, he would have pushed them into that. His state of mind was not new; it was an oft experienced and by now tamed and gentled despair. He washed his hands, put on his hat and coat and went out. Change of place was one of his well-tried remedies; he knew it was not good, in such a mood, to stay too long in the same room with all those blank and all those bescribbled sheets of paper. Better to go out, and feel the air and busy one's eyes with the changing spectacle of the streets. Beautiful women might greet him or he might meet a friend; a crowd of schoolchildren or some droll toy in a shop window might change the tenor of his thoughts; the automobile of one of the lords of his world, a newspaper publisher or a rich banker, might run over him at a crossing; all sorts of chances for a change of circumstance, for the creation of a new situation.

He wandered slowly through the early spring, looked at the nodding clusters of snowbells in the sad little patches of grass in front of the boarding houses, breathed the soft, moist March air and was enticed by it into entering a park. There he sat down on a sunny bench between the bare trees, closed his eyes and gave himself up to the play of the senses in this hour of premature spring sunshine: how softly the air touched his cheeks, with what hidden ardor the sun already seethed, how tart and anxious the earth smelled, with what engaging playfulness the little shoes of children pattered, from time to time, over the gravel of the road, how charmingly and all too sweetly somewhere in the naked copse a blackbird was singing. Yes, all this was very beautiful, and since the spring, the sun, the children, the blackbird were all age-old things in which man had rejoiced for thousands and thousands of years, it was really incomprehensible that one should not be able to make a beautiful spring poem this very day just as well as fifty or a hundred years ago. And yet it was useless. The briefest recollection of Uhland's Spring Song (with the Schubert music, to be sure, whose prelude tastes so penetratingly and excitingly

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of early spring) was sufficient to show a present-day poet most conclusively that those enchanting things were, for the time being, exhausted as subjects for poetry and that there was no sense in attempting to imitate in any way those inexhaustibly full, blessedly living creations.

At this instant, as the poet's thoughts were on the point of slipping back into their old, unfruitful groove, he peeped out from beneath lowered eyelids and perceived, not with his eyes alone, a luminous fluttering and twinkling, islands of sunshine, reflected light, shadowy hollows, blue sky touched with white, a flickering round of dancing lights such as anyone sees when squinting at the sun, only somehow significant, in some fashion valuable and unique, transformed through some secret content from simple perception into an experience. What flashed out here in prismatic hues, fluctuating, receding, undulating and pulsing, was not just a storm of light from outside whose theater was simply the eye, it was at the same time life, the impulse surging up from within, and its theater was the soul, was his own fate. This is the way the poets see, the "seers"; this is the enchanting and shattering fashion in which those who have been touched by Eros feel. Gone was all thought of Uhland and Schubert and spring songs; there no longer was an Uhland, a poetry, a past; everything was the eternal instant, was experience, was profoundest reality.

In complete submission to this miracle—which he had experienced before, but for which he thought he had long since forfeited the capacity and grace—he hovered for unending instants in timelessness, in a harmony of world and soul, he felt his breath waft the clouds, he felt the warm sun revolving in his breast.

But while he remained surrendered to this strange experience, his eyes narrowed and all the gates of sense half closed, for he knew the propitious current came from within—he became aware of something close to him on the ground that riveted his attention. It was, as he realized only slowly and by degrees, a girl's foot, a child's; it was in a low, brown shoe and it moved firmly and gaily upon the sand of the walk with the weight on the heel. This little girl's shoe, the brown of the leather, the childish happy lifting of the little sole, the span of silk stocking over a delicate ankle, reminded the poet of something, overwhelmed his heart suddenly and urgently like the recollection of a profound experience, but he could not find the

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thread. A child's shoe, a child's foot, a child's stocking—what connection could they have with him? Where was the key? Where was the spring in his soul that responded to just this image among millions, loved it, drew it close, perceived it as precious and important? For an instant he opened his eyes wide, saw for the space of half a heartbeat the whole figure of the child, a pretty child, but he realized at once that this was no longer the image that concerned him, that was important to him, and with involuntary speed he closed his eyes again to the point where he could just see, for the remnant of an instant, the child's disappearing foot. Then he shut his eyes completely, meditating on the foot, feeling its significance, yet not understanding it, tormented by his fruitless searching, enraptured by the power of the image in his soul. Somewhere, sometime this little image, this delicate foot in its brown shoe, had been perceived by him and had become infused with the value of experience. When had that happened? Oh, it must have been a long time ago, ages ago, so far away did it seem to lie, from such a long way off, from such unthinkable depths of space did it look up at him, so deep was it sunk in the well of his memory. Perhaps he had been carrying it within him, lost and never regained until today, since the very beginnings of childhood, since that fabulous time whose memories are all so indistinct and formless, so hard to recall, and yet are more colorful, warmer, fuller, than all later memories. For a long time with closed eyes he rocked his head, lost in reflection, seeing now this, now that clue light up, this series, that chain of experiences, but nowhere was the child with the brown shoe at home. No, she was not to be found, it was hopeless to continue the search.

His experience in this memory quest was like that of a man who cannot recognize something directly in front of him because he thinks of it as far away and therefore misinterprets all its features. But then at the moment when he abandoned his efforts and was ready to forget this ridiculous little squint-eyed incident, the thing twisted around and the child's shoe fell into place. With a deep sigh the man suddenly realized that in the crowded storeroom of his inner life the child's shoe did not lie at the bottom, did not belong among his ancient possessions, but was quite fresh and new. Only recently had he been concerned with this child, only recently, so it seemed to him, had he seen that shoe running off.

And now all of a sudden he had it. Yes, oh yes, there it was,

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there stood the child whose shoe it was, part of a dream the writer had dreamed the night before. Dear God, how was such forgetfulness possible? In the middle of the night he had awakened, enchanted and shaken by the mysterious power of his dream, had awakened with the feeling of having had a significant and splendid experience—and then he had presently gone to sleep again, and a single hour of morning sleep had sufficed to wipe out the whole splendid experience so that only at this second, wakened by the fleeting sight of the child's foot, had he thought of it again. So fleeting, so transitory, so completely subject to chance were the deepest, the most wonderful experiences of the soul! And look, even now he was not successful in building up in his mind the whole of last night's dream. Only isolated pictures, some of them unconnected, were still to be found, some fresh and full of living radiance, others already gray and dusty, already on the point of fading away. And yet what a beautiful, profound, life-giving dream it had been! How his heart had beaten when he first awoke in the night, enchanted and afraid like a child on a holiday! How completely filled he had been with the lively assurance that this dream had been a noble, profound, unforgettable, never to be lost experience! And now, only a few hours later, all that was left was these fragments, these few fading pictures, this faint echo in his heart—all the rest was lost, gone, no longer alive!

All the same, these few bits at least had been rescued. The writer immediately decided to search about in his memory for whatever was left of the dream and write it down as truly and accurately as possible. At once he took his notebook out of his pocket and made the first entries in catch-words with the intention of establishing if possible the structure and outline, the general shape of the dream. But in this too he was unsuccessful. Neither beginning nor end could now be distinguished, and he did not know where most of the remaining fragments fitted into the dream story. No, he would have to set about it differently. He must, first of all, rescue what was within reach, must at once fix firmly the few unfaded images, above all the child's shoe, before they too, those timid magic birds, had fled.

Like an archeologist attempting to decipher a new-found inscription, starting with the few still recognizable letters or pictograms, so our man sought to read his dream by putting it together piece by piece.

In the dream he had had something to do with a girl, a strange,

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perhaps not really beautiful but somehow fascinating girl, who was perhaps thirteen or fourteen years old but small for her age. Her face was tanned. Her eyes? No, he did not see them. Her name? Unknown. Her relationship to him, the dreamer? Stop, there was the brown shoe! He saw it move, together with its twin, saw it dancing, saw it take a dance step, a step in the Boston. Oh yes, now one knew a lot. He must begin all over again.

Well then: in the dream he had danced with a strange, marvelous little girl, a child with a tanned face and brown shoes—had not everything about her been brown? Her hair too? And her eyes? No, he could no longer be sure—it was reasonable, it seemed possible, but it was not certain. He must stick to certainties, to what had firm support in his memory, otherwise he would be lost. Already he was beginning to suspect that this dream search would lead him far afield, that he had set out upon a long, an unending road. And at that very instant he found another piece.

Yes, he had danced with the little one, or had wanted to dance, or had been supposed to dance, and she had taken a series of gay, buoyant, enchantingly formal dance steps all by herself. Or had he after all danced with her, had she in fact not been alone? No. No, he had not danced, he had only wanted to, or rather it had been agreed, by him and by someone else, that he was to dance with the little brown girl. But then the little one had after all begun to dance alone, without him, and he had been somehow afraid of the dance or embarrassed; it was the Boston, a dance he did not know well. But she had begun to dance by herself, playfully, with marvelous rhythm, her little brown shoes carefully describing the figures of the dance on the rug. But why had he himself not danced? Or why had he originally wanted to dance? What sort of agreement had there been? He could not discover.

Another question presented itself: Whom had the precious child resembled, of whom had she reminded him? For a long time he searched in vain; again everything seemed hopeless, and for a moment he became really impatient and irritated, again he was almost ready to give up. But there once more came a flash, a new clue blazed up. The little one had resembled his beloved—oh no, resemblance was not it, he had even been surprised that she was so little like her, although she was her sister. Stop! Her sister? Oh now the whole search was illuminated, took on meaning; everything was

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there again. He began once more to make notes, overcome by the suddenly emerging inscription, deeply delighted by the return of the pictures he had thought lost.

Thus it had been: Magda, his beloved, had been present in the dream; moreover she had not been quarrelsome and ill disposed as of late but altogether friendly, rather quiet but contented and beautiful. Magda had greeted him with a strange, calm tenderness, had given him her hand without kissing him and had explained that now at last she was going to introduce him to her mother and that there at her mother's he would meet her younger sister who was destined later to become his beloved and his wife. Her sister was much younger than she and very fond of dancing, he would win her quickest by taking her dancing.

How beautiful Magda had been in that dream! How all that was distinctive, lovable, soulful and tender in her being, as those qualities had existed in his mind at the time of his greatest love for her, had shone forth from her cool eyes, her clear brow, her heavy, fragrant hair!

And then in the dream she had led him into a house, her mother's house, the house of her childhood, the house of her soul, so that she might show him her mother and her small, prettier sister, for it was she who was destined to be his beloved. He could not, however, any longer remember the house. Only the empty entrance hall in which he had to wait, nor could he any longer recall the mother; only an old woman, a *bonne* or nurse, dressed in gray or black had been visible in the background. But then the little one had come, the sister, an enchanting child, a girl of perhaps ten or twelve but in manner like one of fourteen. In particular her foot in its brown shoe had been so childlike, so wholly innocent, laughing and unaware, not yet entirely lady-like and yet so womanly! She had received his greeting gaily, and from that moment on Magda had disappeared, only the little one was there. Remembering Magda's advice, he had proposed a dance. And at once she had nodded, beaming, and without hesitation had begun to dance, alone, and he had not even ventured to put his arm around her and dance with her because she was so beautiful and so perfect in her childish dance, and then too because what she was dancing was the Boston, a dance in which he did not feel sure of himself.

In the midst of his struggle to recapture the dream pictures, the

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writer had to smile at himself for a moment. He realized that he had just been thinking how profitless it was to worry about a new poem to spring, since it had all long ago been said unsurpassably—but when he thought about the foot of the dancing child, the light, charming movement of the brown shoes, the neatness of the dance figure they described on the carpet and how, nevertheless, over all this pretty grace and assurance hung a trace of embarrassment, a fragrance of maidenly shyness, then it was clear to him that one need only sing a song to that childish foot in order to surpass all that earlier poets had said about spring and youth and the presentiment of love. But his thoughts had barely strayed into this field, he had barely begun to toy with the idea of a poem "To a Foot in a Brown Shoe," when he realized with horror that the whole dream was beginning to slip from him again, that the blissful pictures were growing insubstantial and melting away. Alarmed he forcibly controlled his thoughts, and yet he realized that at this moment, although he had written down the content of the dream, it did not any longer belong to him completely, that it was beginning to grow alien and old. And he immediately realized, too, that this would always be so: that these enchanting pictures would only belong to him and fill his soul with their fragrance as long as he dwelt upon them wholeheartedly, without ulterior thought, without design, without anxiety.

Thoughtfully the poet started on his way home, carrying the dream before him like an infinitely complex, infinitely fragile toy of thinnest glass. He was full of concern about his dream. Oh if he could only succeed in reconstructing completely within himself the figure of his dream beloved! To restore the whole from the brown shoe, the dancing figure, the shimmer of brown in the little one's face, from these few, precious fragments, seemed more important to him than anything else in the world. And was it not in fact infinitely important to him? Had not this charming spring figure been promised to him as his beloved, had she not been born out of the deepest and best springs of his soul, had she not come to meet him as a symbol of his future, as a presentiment of what fate held in store for him?—And while he was filled with concern, he was nevertheless infinitely happy in the depths of his being. Was it not marvelous that one could dream such things, that one bore within oneself this world of airiest magic stuff, that inside our souls where we have so often

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sought in vain, as though in a refuse heap, some remnant of faith, of joy, of life, that inside these souls such flowers could spring up?

Arrived home, the writer shut the door behind him and lay back in his easy chair. Notebook in hand, he read through his jottings attentively and found that they were worthless, that they contributed nothing, that they only hindered and obstructed. He tore out the pages and carefully destroyed them and decided not to write down anything more. In agitation he lay there seeking composure, and suddenly another piece of the dream emerged. All at once he saw himself again in the unfamiliar house, waiting in the bare entrance hall, saw in the background an anxious old lady in a dark dress moving back and forth, felt once more the moment of fate: that now Magda had gone to bring him his new, younger, fairer, his true and eternal beloved. Kindly and anxiously the old woman looked over at him—and behind her features and behind her gray clothes other features and other clothes were discernable, faces of attendants and nurses out of his own childhood, the face and gray housedress of his mother. And so from this layer of memories, from this motherly, sisterly circle of pictures, he felt the future, the beloved, growing to meet him. Behind this empty entrance hall, under the eyes of anxious, sweet, devoted mothers and maids, had grown the child, whose love was to bless him, whose possession was to be his happiness and whose future was to be his own.

Magda, too, he now saw again; how she greeted him without a kiss so tenderly and earnestly, how her face had once more contained, as though in the golden light of evening, all the magic it had once held for him, how at the moment of renunciation and parting she once more shone with all the amiability of their happiest times, how her thoughtful, serious countenance heralded in advance the younger, fairer one, the true, the only one, whom she had come to bring him and to help him win. She seemed to be a symbol of love itself, her humility, her pliability, her half maternal, half childlike magic power. All that he had ever read into this woman, all that he had dreamed and wished and invented for her, all the glorification and worship he had offered her in the high time of his love, were concentrated in her face, her whole soul and his own love shone visibly from her serious, lovely features, smiled sadly and kindly from her eyes. Was it possible to take leave of such a beloved? But her glance said: parting must be, way must be made for the new.

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And on the nimble feet of a little child in came the new, in came her sister, but her face was not to be seen, nothing of her was clearly to be seen except that she was small and delicate, had on brown shoes, was brown in face and brown in dress and that she could dance with enchanting perfection. And moreover the Boston—the dance her future lover did not know by any means well. Nothing could have better expressed the superiority of the child over the grown, experienced, often disillusioned man than that she danced so freely, lithely, faultlessly, and in particular the dance in which he was weak, in which he was hopelessly inferior to her!

All day the writer remained busied with his dream, and the deeper he penetrated into it the more beautiful it appeared to him and the more it seemed to excell all the poems of the best poets. For a long time, for many days, he cherished the desire to record this dream so that it would have, not for the dreamer alone but for others as well, this unspeakable beauty, depth and intensity. Only at long last he abandoned these wishes and efforts and realized that he must content himself with being a true poet, a dreamer, a seer, only in his soul, and that his handiwork must remain that of a simple man of letters.

## TRAGIC

When the editor-in-chief was told that Johannes the compositor had been waiting for an hour in the anteroom and would on no account be turned away or put off, he nodded with a smile of melancholy resignation and swung around in his office chair to meet his silently entering visitor. He knew in advance what sort of request had brought the faithful, white-bearded compositor to see him, knew the request was a hopeless one, both sentimental and boring, and knew that he could not meet this man's wishes or do him any other service except to listen courteously to what he had to say. Since the petitioner, who had served the newspaper as typesetter for many years, was not only a sympathetic and worthy human being but an educated man as well, an author in fact, who had been highly esteemed in the pre-modern period, had been indeed almost famous, the editor experienced on the occasions of his visits,

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which took place customarily once or twice a year and always had the same purpose and the same success or rather lack of it, a feeling compounded of sympathy and embarrassment. Now the feeling rose to active discomfort as his caller quietly entered, closing the doors behind him with meticulous courtesy and absolute soundlessness.

"Sit down, Johannes," the editor-in-chief said in an encouraging tone (almost the same tone he had once employed toward young writers when he had been editor of the book section and now employed toward young politicians). "How goes it? Any complaints?"

Johannes regarded him timidly and sadly out of eyes that were surrounded by thousands of tiny wrinkles, child's eyes in the face of an ancient.

"It's always the same thing," he said in a soft, sad voice. "And it's getting steadily worse, it's rapidly approaching complete ruin. I have recently noticed dreadful symptoms. Things that ten years ago would have made even the average reader's hair stand on end are not only willingly accepted by today's readers in the news notes and the sports section, not to mention the advertisements—no, they have even invaded the book section, even the lead editorials. Even with good, established authors these mistakes, these monstrosities and evidences of degeneration have today become a matter of course, they have become the rule. Even with you, sir, the editor-in-chief, forgive me, even with you! I have long ago given up mentioning the fact that our written language is now no better than a beggar's jargon, destitute and louse-infested, that all beautiful, rich, rare, highly evolved forms have disappeared, that for years now I have failed to find a single future perfect in any lead article, let alone a rich, deep-breathed, nobly constructed, elastic-paced sentence, a true period, aware of its own structure, beautifully rising and gracefully dying away. That, I know, is gone. Just as in Borneo and all those other islands they have extirpated the bird of paradise, the elephant and the king tiger, they have destroyed and abolished all the lovely sentences, all the inversions, all the delicate play and shading of our dear language. I know there's nothing left to be saved there. But the absolute errors, the uncorrected slips, the complete irresponsibility toward even the first principles of grammatical logic! Alas, Herr Doktor, out of habit they will begin a sentence with 'Although' or with 'On the one hand,' and will forget within two

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lines the not very complicated obligation that such an opening entails; they suppress the independent clause, switch to a new construction, and it is only the best of them who attempt to hide the scandal behind a dash or to attenuate it through the connecting link of a series of dots. You know, sir, that this dash is a part of your armory too. Once, years ago, it was poison to me, I hated it, but things have now come to such a pass that today I greet it with emotion whenever it appears; I am deeply grateful to you for every one of these dashes, for after all they are a remnant of former times, an evidence of culture, of bad conscience, they are abbreviated, coded confessions on the writer's part that he is aware of a certain obligation toward the laws of language, that he is in some measure repentant and regretful when, as too often happens, he is compelled by harsh necessity to sin against the holy spirit of our tongue."

The editor, who had closed his eyes during this dissertation and had gone on with the calculations which his caller had interrupted, now opened his eyes, allowed them to rest brightly on Johannes, smiled benignly and said, slowly, ingratiatingly, visibly at pains to formulate his thoughts properly out of consideration for the old man:

"Look here, Johannes, you are absolutely right; I've always gladly admitted that to you before. You are right: that language of a bygone time, that cultivated, beautifully groomed language which two or three decades ago was still practiced or at least approximated by a number of writers, that language has perished. It perished as the monuments of the Egyptians and the systems of the Gnostics perished, as Athens and Byzantium had to perish. That is sad, dear friend, it is tragic—" (at this word the compositor winced and opened his lips as though to cry out, but controlled himself and sank resignedly back into his former posture) "—but it is our destiny and must be our endeavor, don't you think, to accept what fate brings to pass, however sad that may be. As I have said to you before, it is a fine thing to preserve a certain loyalty toward the past, and in your case I not only understand this loyalty I am compelled to admire it. But this clinging to things and circumstances that are once and for all doomed to destruction must be kept within bounds. Life itself imposes those bounds, and when we transgress them, when we attach ourselves too firmly to the old, we come into conflict with life, which is stronger than we are. I understand you very well,

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please believe that. You, the accomplished master of that language, to whom that fine, inherited tradition is intimately known, you, the former poet, must naturally suffer more than others at the degenerative, transitional state in which our language, our whole former culture, finds itself. The fact that as a compositor you are compelled to be a daily witness of this deterioration, to participate in it indeed and in some measure to collaborate, has something bitter, something trag—" (at this word Johannes winced again so that the editor automatically chose another phrase) "something of the irony of fate about it. But I can do as little to remedy this as you yourself or anybody else. We must let things go their way and resign ourselves."

The editor looked sympathetically at the old typesetter's face which wore an expression at once childlike and troubled. One had to admit there was something to be said for these gradually disappearing representatives of the old world, of the pre-modern, so-called "sentimental" epoch; they were agreeable folk despite their mournfulness. In a kindly tone he went on:

"You know, dear friend, about twenty years ago the last poetical works were printed in our country, some in book form, although that had already become very rare at that time, and partly in the literary supplements of the papers. Then quite suddenly the realization struck us all that there was something amiss about these poetical works, that they were unnecessary, that actually they were silly. At that time we became aware of something, something thrust itself on our attention, that for a long time had been quietly ripening and now all at once confronted us as an acknowledged fact: the time of art was over, art and poetry in our world had died, and it was better to say good-by to them for good, dead as they were, than to go on dragging them about with us. For all of us, and for me too, that was at the time a bitter realization. And yet we were right in acting upon it. Whoever wants to read Goethe or anything of that sort can do it just as well as before; he loses nothing simply because there is no longer day by day a mountainous aftergrowth of new, feeble, enervated verse. We all adapted ourselves. You did, too, Johannes, by giving up your vocation of poet and seeking the simple post of a wage-earner. And if today in your old age you suffer too much from the fact that as typesetter you come so often into conflict

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with the tradition and practice of language which are still holy in your eyes, then I have a proposal to make: Give up this irksome and thankless work.—Wait a moment, let me finish. You're afraid you'll lose your daily bread? Not at all, that would make us barbarians! No, there's no question of going hungry. You have old-age insurance, and over and above that our company—I give you my word—will grant you a lifetime pension so that you can be permanently sure of the same income you have now." He was pleased with himself. This solution, of granting a pension, had only occurred to him while he was talking.

"Well, what do you say to that?" he asked smiling.

Johannes could not reply immediately. During the kind gentleman's last words his aged child's face had taken on an expression of dreadful apprehensiveness, his faded lips had gone completely white, his eyes stared, fixed and helpless. Only gradually did he regain control of himself. His chief regarded him with disappointment. And so the old man began to speak, he spoke very quietly but with tremendous and anxious urgency, passionately striving to give the right, the persuasive, the irresistible expression of his cause. Little red spots appeared and disappeared on his forehead and cheeks; there was a desperate plea in his eyes, in the crooked angle of his head, for a hearing, for mercy; his wrinkled neck twisted, long, beseeching and ardent, out of the wide collar of his shirt. Johannes said:

"Please forgive me, sir, for having troubled you. I will not do it again, never again. It was done in a good cause, but I realize now that I have been a bother to you. I realize too that you cannot help me, the wheel runs over us all. But for God's sake don't take away my work! You reassure me on the subject of going hungry—but that's something I have never feared! I will even be glad to work for smaller wages; no doubt I am no longer very efficient. But leave me my work, leave me my chance to serve, otherwise you kill me!" And very softly, with glowing eyes, hoarse and intense, he went on: "I have nothing at all but this service, it is the one thing that makes me want to live! Oh, Herr Doktor, how could you make this dreadful proposal, you the only one left who knows me, who still knows who I once was!"

The editor endeavored to quiet the man's alarming excitement by patting him repeatedly on the shoulder to the accompaniment of

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kindly growls. Not because he was calmed but because he sensed the other's good will and sympathy, Johannes began again after a short pause:

"I know, sir, that once in your youth you read Nietzsche's works. Well, I read him too. One evening in my beloved attic study when I was seventeen years old I came upon those pages in *Zarathustra* that contain the Night Song. Never in these almost sixty years have I forgotten that hour, when for the first time I read the words: Night has come; clearer now is the voice of every gushing spring—! For it was at that hour that my life acquired its meaning, that I entered upon that service in which I persevere today, in that hour the marvel of language struck me like sheet lightning, the unspeakable magic of the word; dazzled I looked into an immortal eye, felt a divine presence, and surrendered myself to it as to my fate, my love, my happiness and my destiny. Then I read other poets, found nobler, more holy words than those of the Night Song, found, as though drawn by a magnet, our great poets, whom no one now knows, found the dream-sweet, dream-heavy Novalis, whose magic words all taste of wine and blood, and the fiery young Goethe, and the old Goethe with his secret smile, I found the dark, hurrying, breathless Brentano, the quick, palpitant Hoffmann, the noble Mörike, the slow, painstaking Stifter, and all, all the lordly ones: Jean Paul! Arnim! Büchner! Eichendorf! Heine! I clung to them; my longing was to be their younger brother, to quaff their words, my sacrament; the high, holy wood of this poetry became my temple. In this world I lived; for a time I considered myself almost one of them; I knew the marvelous delight of running my hands through the pliant stuff of words like the wind in the tender foliage of summer, of making words ring, dance, crackle, shudder, snap, sing, shout, freeze, tremble, leap, congeal. There were people who recognized in me a poet, in whose hearts my melodies dwelt like harps. Well, enough of that, enough. There came that time of which you were pleased to speak, the time when our whole race turned away from poetry, when all of us as though with an autumnal pang recognized the fact: Now the temple doors are closed, now it is evening and the high, wild woods of poetry are darkened, no man of today can find the magic path to the inner sanctuary. Quiet had descended and quietly we poets disappeared into the sober land for which great Pan had died."

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The editor squared his shoulders with a feeling of profound unease, an ambiguous and tormenting feeling. To what mad lengths was this poor old man going? He threw him a covert glance which clearly said: "All right, all right, let's drop the subject, we know all about it!" But Johannes had not finished.

"At that time," he went on softly, speaking with difficulty, "at that time I too took leave of poetry, whose heart had ceased to beat. For a while I lived a lamed and thoughtless existence until the diminution and finally the drying up of my customary income from my writings forced me to seek other means of livelihood. I became a typesetter because I had by accident learned this trade as a volunteer at my publisher's. And I have never regretted it although in the first years this day labor tasted very bitter. But I found in it what I needed, what every man needs to be able to live: a task, a meaning for my life. Even a typesetter, honored sir, serves in the temple of language, his handiwork too is done in the service of the word. I dare admit this to you today now that I am an old man: in lead articles, in the supplements, in the parliamentary debates, in the courtroom notices, in the notes on local events and in the advertisements I have quietly corrected many thousands and tens of thousands of linguistic sins, I have re-set and put on their feet many thousand crippled sentences. Oh, what joy that gave me! How fine it was when out of the dictation tossed off by an overworked editor, out of a garbled quotation by some half-educated politician, out of the deformed, paralytic syntax of some reporter, after a few magical touches and alterations, the pure language looked back at me with sound and undistorted features! But as time passed this became constantly harder, the difference between my language and that of the fashionable writers grew constantly greater, the cracks in the structure constantly wider. A lead article that I could have completely healed twenty years ago by means of ten or twelve little services of love, today would require hundreds and thousands of corrections in order to be in my sense readable. It would no longer work, more and more often I had to give up. Well yes, you see, even I am not wholly stiff and reactionary, even I learned, alas, to make concessions and no longer to oppose the great evil.

"But there is still the other, which I called a moment ago my 'minor' service and which for a long time now has been my only

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one. Herr Doktor, compare a column I have set with one in any other paper; the difference will strike you in the eye. Today's compositors, all of them without exception, have long since acquiesced in linguistic depravity, in fact they approve it and hasten it on. There is hardly a single one of them who still knows there is a delicate, inner law, an unwritten law of art, that governs the position of commas, colons and semicolons. And how dreadful, how murderous indeed, is the treatment, first in the typed manuscript and then at the hands of the typesetters, given to those words that stand at the end of a line and have the unmerited misfortune to be too long and must be chopped in two! It is horrible. In our own paper I have had to witness with increasing frequency as the years pass hundreds of thousands of such poor words strangled, falsely divided, dismembered and dishonored words: circ-umference, reg-ards—yes, once there was withd-rawn! Here then is a field where even now I can fight my daily battle, do my small service in the cause. And you, sir, do not know, you cannot imagine, how fine it is, what good it does one, when a word released from the rack, a sentence clarified by proper punctuation, looks gratefully up at the compositor! No, please never again ask me to abandon all this and leave it defenseless!"

Although the editor had known Johannes for years he had never before heard him speak in so animated and personal a way, and while he maintained an attitude of cool detachment toward what was foolish and exaggerated in his harangue, nevertheless he felt too there was some small, hidden value in this confession. Nor was he unaware how highly such conscientiousness and devotion in a compositor were to be prized. Once more he made his intelligent face assume an expression of friendliness and said:

"Well, all right, Johannes, you convinced me some time ago. Under the circumstances my proposal—it was well meant, you know—shall be withdrawn. Go on setting type, keep up the good work! And if there's any other small favor I can do you, just tell me." He rose, stretching out his hand to the compositor, convinced that the latter would now finally go.

But Johannes, seizing the proffered hand with ardor, opened his heart again, saying: "Thank you, sir, from the bottom of my heart. How kind you are! Oh, as a matter of fact, I do have a

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request, a small request. If you would only be willing to help me with it!"

Without sitting down again the editor urged him, with a rather impatient glance, to speak.

"It's about," Johannes said, "once more it's about 'tragic,' Herr Doktor. You know about it, of course; we have discussed it several times before. You are familiar with the reporters' wretched habit of calling every accident tragic, whereas the proper use—well, I must be brief, enough of that. And so every bicyclist who has tumbled off his machine, every child with a burned finger, every cherry picker who has fallen from his ladder is qualified with the desecrated word 'tragic.' I had almost broken our former reporter of that habit, I gave him no peace, at least once a week I went to see him, and he was a kind man, he laughed and often gave in, possibly he even understood, at least in part, what it meant to me. But now the new editor in charge of local items—I'll say nothing about him in other respects, but I am hardly exaggerating when I state: every chicken that is run over provides him with a welcome opportunity to misuse that holy word. If you could arrange an opportunity for me to talk seriously to him, if you would ask him for once at least really to listen to me—" The editor stepped to the switchboard, depressed a key and spoke a few words into the mouthpiece.

"Herr Stettiner will be in his office at two o'clock and will spare you a few minutes. I'll speak to him about it. But be brief when you're talking to him!"

With expressions of thanks the old typesetter took his leave. The editor watched him move gently through the door, saw his thin, white hair straggling down over his funny old linen coat, saw the bent back of the faithful servant and was no longer sorry he had failed to entice the old man into retirement. Let him stay! Let him go on repeating these audiences once or twice a year. He was not angry. He could quite easily put himself in his place.

That, however, was precisely what Herr Stettiner could not do when Johannes turned up in his office at two o'clock (in the press of business the editor-in-chief had, to be sure, forgotten to inform him).

Herr Stettiner, an extremely useful junior member of the staff who had rapidly swung himself up from district reporter to editorial rank, was by no means a monster; moreover as a reporter he had

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learned to get along with all sorts of people. But confronted by the phenomenon of Johannes this knowledgeable man was wholly at a loss; he had not in fact known, he had never dreamed, that this sort of human being exists, or existed. Also as an editor he felt, understandably enough, no obligation to accept advice and admonition from a typesetter, even though the latter might be a hundred years old and even though he might in an earlier, sentimental age have been a celebrity, yes, even if he had been Aristotle himself. And so the inevitable happened; after a few minutes Johannes was hastily escorted to the door by an angry, red-faced editor and forced to leave the office. It happened further that a half hour later in the composing room old Johannes after setting up a quarter column full of unheard-of errors uttered a plaintive whimper and collapsed over his manuscript. An hour later he was dead.

The people in the composing room, so suddenly robbed of their senior member, agreed after a brief, whispered conference to take up a collection for a wreath to be placed on his coffin. To Herr Stettiner, however, fell the task of composing a small notice of the death, for after all Johannes had been, thirty or forty years before, a kind of celebrity.

He wrote "Tragic End of a Poet"—then he remembered that Johannes had had an odd prejudice against the word "tragic." The strange figure of the ancient and his sudden death shortly after their conversation had, after all, made enough impression on him to make him feel obliged to pay the dead man some honor. Accordingly he struck out the headline and replaced it with the words "Regrettable Demise," suddenly found this, too, empty and inadequate, became annoyed, pulled himself together and wrote over his notice the final headline "One of the Old Guard."

(*Translated from the German by Denver Lindley*)

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## Lionel Trilling

# MANSFIELD PARK

Sooner or later, when we speak of Jane Austen, we speak of her irony, and it is better to speak of it sooner rather than later because nothing can so far mislead us about her work as a wrong understanding of this one aspect of it. Most people either value irony too much or fear it too much. This is true of their response to irony in its first simple meaning, that of a device of rhetoric by which we say one thing and intend its opposite, or intend more, or less, than we say. It is equally true of their response to irony in its derived meaning, the loose generalized sense in which we speak of irony as a quality of someone's mind, Montaigne's for example. Both the excessive valuation and the excessive fear of irony lead us to misconceive the part it can play in the intellectual and moral life. To Jane Austen, irony does not mean, as it means to many, a moral detachment or the tone of superiority that goes with moral detachment. Upon irony so conceived she has made her own judgment in the figure of Mr. Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice,* whose irony of moral detachment is shown to be the cause of his becoming a moral nonentity.

Jane Austen's irony is only secondarily a matter of tone. Primarily it is a method of comprehension. It perceives the world through an awareness of its contradictions, paradoxes, and anomalies. It is by no means detached. It is partisan with generosity of spirit—it is on the side of "life," of "affirmation." But it is preoccupied not only with the charm of the expansive virtues but also with the cost at which they are to be gained and exercised. This cost is regarded as being at once ridiculously high and perfectly fair. What we may call Jane Austen's first or basic irony is the recognition of the fact that spirit is not free, that it is conditioned, that it is limited by cir-

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cumstance. This, as everyone knows from childhood on, is indeed an anomaly. Her next and consequent irony, has reference to the fact that only by reason of this anomaly does spirit have virtue and meaning.

In irony, even in the large derived sense of the word, there is a kind of malice. The ironist has the intention of practicing upon the misplaced confidence of the literal mind, of disappointing comfortable expectation. Jane Austen's malice of irony is directed not only upon certain of the characters of her novels but also upon the reader himself. We are quick, too quick, to understand that *Northanger Abbey* invites us into a snug conspiracy to disabuse the little heroine of the errors of her corrupted fancy—Catherine Morland, having become addicted to novels of terror, has accepted their inadmissible premise, she believes that life is violent and unpredictable. And that is exactly what life is shown to be by the events of the story: it is we who must be disabused of our belief that life is sane and orderly. The shock of our surprise at the disappointment of our settled views is of course the more startling because we believe that we have settled our views in conformity with the author's own. Just when we have concluded in *Sense and Sensibility* that we ought to prefer Elinor Dashwood's sense to Marianne Dashwood's sensibility, Elinor herself yearns toward the anarchic passionateness of sensibility. In *Emma* the heroine is made to stand at bay to our adverse judgment through virtually the whole novel, but we are never permitted to close in for the kill—some unnamed quality in the girl, some trait of vivacity or will, erects itself into a moral principle, or at least a vital principle, and frustrates our moral blood-lust.

This interference with our moral and intellectual comfort, constitutes, as I say, a malice on the part of the author. And when we respond to Jane Austen with pleasure, we are likely to do so in part because we recognize in her work an analogue with the malice of the experienced universe, with the irony of circumstance, which is always disclosing more than we bargained for.

But there is one novel of Jane Austen's, *Mansfield Park,* in which the characteristic irony seems not to be at work. Indeed, one might say of this novel that it undertakes to discredit irony and to affirm literalness, that it demonstrates that there are no two ways about anything. And *Mansfield Park* is for this reason held by many

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to be the novel that is least representative of Jane Austen's peculiar attractiveness. For those who admire her it is likely to make an occasion for embarrassment. By the same token, it is the novel which the depreciators of Jane Austen may cite most tellingly in justification of their antagonism.

About this antagonism a word must be said. Few writers have been the object of an admiration so fervent as that which is given to Jane Austen. At the same time, she has been the object of great dislike. Lord David Cecil has said that the people who do not like Jane Austen are the kind of people "who do not like sunshine and unselfishness," and Dr. Chapman, the distinguished editor of Jane Austen's novels and letters, although he dissents from Lord David's opinion, has speculated that perhaps "a certain lack of charity" plays a part in the dislike. But Mark Twain, to take but one example, manifestly did not lack charity or dislike sunshine and unselfishness, and Mark Twain said of Jane Austen that she inspired in him an "animal repugnance." The personal intensity of both parties to the dispute will serve to suggest how momentous, how elemental, is the issue that Jane Austen presents.

The *animality* of Mark Twain's repugnance is probably to be taken as the male's revulsion from a society in which women seem to be at the center of interest and power, as a man's panic fear at a fictional world in which the masculine principle, although represented as admirable and necessary, is prescribed and controlled by a female mind. Professor Garrod, whose essay, "Jane Austen, A Depreciation," is a *summa* of all the reasons for disliking Jane Austen, expresses a repugnance which is very nearly as feral as Mark Twain's; he implies that a direct sexual insult is being offered to men by a woman author who "describes everything in the youth of women which does not matter" in such a way as to appeal to "that age in men when they have begun to ask themselves whether anything matters." The sexual protest is not only masculine—Charlotte Brontë despised Jane Austen for representing men and women as nothing but ladies and gentlemen.

The sexual objection to Jane Austen is a very common one, even when it is not made explicit. It is not valid, but it must be taken into serious account. But then there is Emerson with his characteristic sexual indifference, his striking lack of animality, and

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Emerson's objecton to Jane Austen is quick and entire, is instinctual. He says that she is "sterile" and goes on to call her "vulgar." Emerson held this opinion out of his passion of concern for the liberty of the self and the autonomy of spirit, and his holding it must make us see that the sexual reason for disliking Jane Austen must be subsumed under another reason which is larger, and, actually, even more elemental: the fear of imposed constraint. Dr. Chapman says something of this sort when he speaks of "political prejudice" and "impatient idealism" as perhaps having something to do with the dislike of Jane Austen. But these phrases, apart from the fact that they prejudge the case, do not suggest the biological force of the resistance which certain temperaments offer to the idea of society as a limiting condition of the individual spirit.

Such temperaments are not likely to take Jane Austen's irony as a melioration of her particular idea of society. On the contrary, they are likely to suppose that irony is but the engaging manner by which she masks society's crude coercive power. And they can point to *Mansfield Park* to show what the social coercion is in all its literal truth, before irony has beglamoured us about it and induced us to be comfortable with it—here it is in all its negation, in all the force of its repressiveness. Perhaps no other work of genius has ever spoken, or seemed to speak, so insistently for cautiousness and constraint, even for dullness. No other great novel has so anxiously asserted the need to find security, to establish, in fixity and enclosure, a refuge from the dangers of openness and chance.

There is scarcely one of our modern pieties that it does not offend. Despite our natural tendency to permit costume and manners to separate her world from ours, most readers have no great difficulty in realizing that all the other novels of Jane Austen are, in essential ways, of our modern time. This is the opinion of the many students with whom I have read the novels; not only do the young men controvert by their enthusiasm the judgment of Professor Garrod that Jane Austen appeals only to men of middle age, but they easily and naturally assume her to have a great deal to say to them about the modern personality. But *Mansfield Park* is the exception, and it is bitterly resented. It scandalizes the modern assumptions about social relations, about virtue, about religion, sex, and art. Most troubling of all is its preference for rest over motion. To deal with

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the world by condemning it, by withdrawing from it and shutting it out, by making oneself and one's mode and principles of life the very center of existence and to live the round of one's days in the stasis and peace thus contrived—this, in an earlier age, was one of the recognized strategies of life, but to us it seems not merely impracticable but almost wicked.

Yet *Mansfield Park* is a great novel, its greatness being commensurate with its power to offend.

*Mansfield Park* was published in 1814, only one year after the publication of *Pride and Prejudice,* and no small part of its interest derives from the fact that it seems to controvert everything that its predecessor tells us about life. One of the striking things about *Pride and Prejudice* is that it achieves a quality of transcendence through comedy. The comic mode typically insists upon the fact of human limitation, even of human littleness, but *Pride and Prejudice* makes comedy reverse itself and yield the implication of a divine enlargement. The novel celebrates the traits of spiritedness, vivacity, celerity, and lightness, and associates them with happiness and virtue. Its social doctrine is a generous one, asserting the right of at least the *good* individual to define himself according to his own essence. It is animated by an impulse to forgiveness. One understands very easily why many readers are moved to explain their pleasure in the book by reference to Mozart, especially *The Marriage of Figaro.*

Almost the opposite can be said of *Mansfield Park.* Its impulse is not to forgive but to condemn. Its praise is not for social freedom but for social stasis. It takes full notice of spiritedness, vivacity, celerity, and lightness, but only to reject them as having nothing to do with virtue and happiness, as being, indeed, deterrents to the good life.

Nobody, I believe, has ever found it possible to like the heroine of *Mansfield Park.* Fanny Price is overtly virtuous and consciously virtuous. Our modern literary feeling is very strong against people who, when they mean to be virtuous, believe they know how to reach their goal and do reach it. We think that virtue is not interesting, even that it is not really virtue, unless it manifests itself as a product of "grace" operating through a strong inclination to sin. Our favorite saint is likely to be Augustine; he is sweetened for us

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by his early transgressions. We cannot understand how any age could have been interested in Patient Griselda. We admire Milton only if we believe with Blake that he was of the Devil's party, of which we are fellow-travelers; the paradox of the *felix culpa* and the "fortunate fall" appeals to us for other than theological reasons and serves to validate all sins and all falls, which we take to be the signs of life.

It does not reconcile us to the virtue of Fanny Price that it is rewarded by more than itself. The shade of Pamela hovers over her career. We take failure to be the mark of true virtue and we do not like it that, by reason of her virtue, the terrified little stranger in Mansfield Park grows up to be virtually its mistress.

Even more alienating is the state of the heroine's health. Fanny is in a debilitated condition through the greater part of the novel. At a certain point the author retrieves this situation and sees to it that Fanny becomes taller, prettier, and more energetic. But the first impression remains of a heroine who cannot cut a basket of roses without fatigue and headache.

Fanny's debility becomes the more striking when we consider that no quality of the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice* is more appealing than her physical energy. We think of Elizabeth Bennet as in physical movement; her love of dancing confirms our belief that she moves gracefully. It is characteristic of her to smile; she likes to tease; she loves to talk. She is remarkably responsive to all attractive men. And to outward seeming, Mary Crawford of *Mansfield Park* is another version of Elizabeth Bennet, and Mary Crawford is the antithesis of Fanny Price. The boldness with which the antithesis is contrived is typical of the uncompromising honesty of *Mansfield Park*. Mary Crawford is conceived—is calculated—to win the charmed admiration of almost any reader. She is all pungency and wit. Her mind is as lively and competent as her body; she can bring not only a horse but a conversation to the gallop. She is downright, open, intelligent, impatient. Irony is her natural mode, and we are drawn to think of her voice as being as nearly the author's own as Elizabeth Bennet's is. Yet in the end we are asked to believe that she is not to be admired, that her lively mind compounds, by very reason of its liveliness, with the world, the flesh, and the devil.

This strange, this almost perverse, rejection of Mary Crawford's vitality in favor of Fanny's debility lies at the very heart of the

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novel's intention. "The divine," said T. E. Hulme in *Speculations,* "is not life at its intensest. It contains in a way an almost anti-vital element." Perhaps it cannot quite be said that "the divine" is the object of Fanny's soul, yet she is a Christian heroine. Hulme expresses with an air of discovery what was once taken for granted in Christian feeling. Fanny is one of the poor in spirit. It is not a condition of the soul to which we are nowadays sympathetic. We are likely to suppose that it masks hostility—many modern readers respond to Fanny by suspecting her. This is perhaps not unjustified, but as we try to understand what Jane Austen meant by the creation of such a heroine, we must have in mind the tradition which affirmed the peculiar sanctity of the sick, the weak, and the dying. The tradition perhaps came to an end for literature with the death of Milly Theale, the heroine of Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove,* but Dickens exemplifies its continuing appeal in the nineteenth century, and it was especially strong in the eighteenth century. Clarissa's sickness and death confirm her Christian virtue, and in Fielding's *Amelia,* the novel which may be said to bear the same relation to *Tom Jones* that *Mansfield Park* bears to *Pride and Prejudice,* the sign of the heroine's Christian authority is her loss of health and beauty.

Fanny is a Christian heroine: it is therefore not inappropriate that the issue between her and Mary Crawford should be concentrated in the debate over whether or not Edmund Bertram shall become a clergyman. We are not, however, from our reading of the novel, inclined to say more than that the debate is "not inappropriate"—it startles us to discover that ordination was what Jane Austen said her novel was to be "about." In the letter in which she tells of having received the first copies of *Pride and Prejudice,* and while she is still in high spirits over her achievement, she says, "Now I will try and write something else, and it shall be a complete change of subject—ordination." A novelist, of course, presents a new subject to himself, or to his friends, in all sorts of ways that are inadequate to his real intention as it eventually will disclose itself—the most unsympathetic reader of *Mansfield Park* would scarcely describe it as being about ordination. Yet the question of ordination is of essential importance to the novel.

It is not really a religious question, but, rather, a cultural question, having to do with the meaning and effect of a *profession.* Two

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senses of that word are in point here, the open avowal of principles and beliefs as well as a man's commitment to a particular kind of life-work. It is the latter sense that engages us first. The argument between Fanny and Mary is over what will happen to Edmund as a person, as a *man,* if he chooses to become a clergyman. To Mary, every clergyman is the Mr. Collins of *Pride and Prejudice*; she thinks of ordination as a surrender of manhood. But Fanny sees the Church as a career that claims a man's best manly energies; her expressed view of the Churchman's function is that which was to develop through the century, exemplified in, say, Thomas Arnold, who found the Church to be an adequate field for what he called his talents for command.

The matter of a man's profession was of peculiar importance to Jane Austen. It weighs heavily against Mr. Bennet that, his estate being entailed, he has made no effort to secure his family against his death, and by reason of his otiosity he is impotent to protect his family's good name from the consequences of Lydia's sexual escapade. He is represented as being not only less a man but also as less a gentleman than his brother-in-law Gardiner, who is in trade in London. Jane Austen's feelings about men in relation to their profession reach their highest intensity in *Persuasion,* in the great comic scene in which Sir Walter Elliot is flattered by Mrs. Clay's telling him that every profession puts its mark upon a man's face, and that a true gentleman will avoid this vulgar injury to his complexion. And in the same novel much is made of the professional pride of the Navy and the good effect it has upon the personal character.

In nineteenth-century England the ideal of professional commitment inherits a large part of the moral prestige of the ideal of the gentleman. Such figures as the engineer Daniel Doyce of *Little Dorrit* or Dr. Lydgate of *Middlemarch* represent the developing belief that a man's moral life is bound up with his loyalty to the discipline of his calling. The concern with the profession was an aspect of the ethical concept which was prepotent in the spiritual life of England in the nineteenth century, the concept of duty. The Church, in its dominant form and characteristic virtue, was here quite at one with the tendency of secular feeling; its preoccupation may be said to have been less with the achievement of salvation than with the performance of duty.

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The word grates upon our moral ear. We do what we should do, but we shrink from giving it the name of duty. "Co-operation," "social mindedness," the "sense of the group," "class solidarity"—these locutions do not mean what duty means. They have been invented precisely for the purpose of describing right conduct in such a way as *not* to imply what duty implies—a self whose impulses and desires are very strong, and a willingness to subordinate these impulses and desires to the claim of some external non-personal good. The new locutions are meant to suggest that right action is typically to be performed without any pain to the self.

The men of the nineteenth century did not imagine this possibility. They thought that morality was terribly hard to achieve, at the cost of renunciation and sacrifice. We of our time often wonder what could have made the difficulty. We wonder, for example, why a man like Matthew Arnold felt it necessary to remind himself almost daily of duty, why he believed that the impulses must be "bridled" and "chained down," why he insisted on the "strain and labour and suffering" of the moral life. We are as much puzzled as touched by the tone in which F. W. H. Myers tells of walking with George Eliot in the Fellows' Garden at Trinity "on an evening of rainy May," and she, speaking of God, Immortality, and Duty, said how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable the second, "yet how peremptory and absolute the third." "Never, perhaps, have sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing Law. I listened, and night fell; her grave majestic countenance turned towards me like a sybil's in the gloom; it was as though she withdrew from my grasp, one by one, the two scrolls of promise, and left me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fate."

The diminution of faith in the promise of religion accounts for much but not for all the concern with duty in nineteenth-century England. It was not a crisis of religion that made Wordsworth the laureate of duty. What Wordsworth asks in his great poem "Resolution and Independence," is how the self, in its highest manifestation, in the Poet, can preserve itself from its own nature, from the very sensibility and volatility that define it, from its own potentiality of what Wordsworth calls with superb explicitness "despondency and madness." Something has attenuated the faith in the self of four

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years before, of "Tintern Abbey," the certitude that "Nature never did betray/The heart that loved her": a new Paraclete is needed and he comes in the shape of the Old Leech Gatherer, a man rocklike in endurance, rocklike in insensibility, annealed by a simple, rigorous religion, preserved in life and in virtue by the "anti-vital element" and transfigured by that element.

That the self may destroy the self by the very energies that define its being, that the self may be preserved by the negation of its own energies—this, whether or not we agree, makes a paradox, makes an irony, that catches our imagination. Much of the nineteenth-century preoccupation with duty was not a love of Law for its own sake, but rather a concern with the hygiene of the self. If we are aware of this, we are prepared to take seriously an incident in *Mansfield Park* that on its face is perfectly absurd.

The great fuss that is made over the amateur theatricals can seem to us a mere travesty on virtue. And the more so because it is never made clear why it is so very wrong for young people in a dull country house to put on a play. The mystery deepens, as does our sense that *Mansfield Park* represents an unusual state of the author's mind, when we know that amateur theatricals were a favorite amusement in Jane Austen's home. The play is Kotzebue's *Lovers' Vows* and it deals with illicit love and a bastard, but Jane Austen, as her letters and novels clearly show, was not a prude. Some of the scenes of the play permit Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford to make love in public, but this is not said to be decisively objectionable. What is decisive is a traditional, almost primitive, feeling about dramatic impersonation. We know of this, of course, from Plato, and it is one of the points on which almost everyone feels superior to Plato, but it may have more basis in actuality than we commonly allow. It is the fear that the impersonation of a bad or inferior character will have a harmful effect upon the impersonator, that, indeed, the impersonation of any other self will diminish the integrity of the real self.

A right understanding of the seemingly absurd episode of the play must dispel any doubt of the largeness of the cultural significance of *Mansfield Park*. The American philosopher George Mead has observed that the "assumption of roles" was one of the most important elements of romanticism. Mead conceived of impersona-

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tion as a new mode of thought appropriate to that new sense of the self which was romanticism's characteristic achievement. It was, he said further, the self's method of defining itself. Involved as we all are in this mode of thought and in this method of self-definition, we are not likely to respond sympathetically to Jane Austen when she puts it under attack as being dangerous to the integrity of the self as a moral agent. Yet the testimony of John Keats stands in her support—in one of his most notable letters Keats says of the poet that, as poet, he cannot be a moral agent; he has no "character," no "self," no "identity"; he is concerned not with moral judgment but with "gusto," subordinating his own being to that of the objects of his creative regard. Wordsworth implies something of a related sort when he contrasts the poet's volatility of mood with the bulking permanence of identity of the Old Leech Gatherer. And of course not only the poet but the reader may be said to be involved in the problems of identity and of (in the literal sense) integrity. Literature offers the experience of the diversification of the self, and Jane Austen puts the question of literature at the moral center of her novel.

The massive ado that is organized about the amateur theatricals and the dangers of impersonation thus has a direct bearing upon the matter of Edmund Bertram's profession. The election of a profession is of course in a way the assumption of a role, but it is a permanent impersonation which makes virtually impossible the choice of another. It is a commitment which fixes the nature of the self.

The ado about the play extends its significance still further. It points, as it were, to a great and curious triumph of Jane Austen's art. The triumph consists in this—that although on a first reading of *Mansfield Park* Mary Crawford's speeches are all delightful, they diminish in charm as we read the novel a second time. We begin to hear something disagreeable in their intonation: it is the peculiarly modern bad quality which Jane Austen was the first to represent—insincerity. This is a trait very different from the *hypocrisy* of the earlier novelists. Mary Crawford's intention is not to deceive the world but to comfort herself; she impersonates the woman she thinks she ought to be. And as we become inured to the charm of her performance we see through the moral impersonation and are troubled that it should have been thought necessary. In Mary Crawford we

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have the first brilliant example of a distinctively modern type, the person who cultivates the *style* of sensitivity, virtue, and intelligence.

Henry Crawford has more sincerity than his sister, and the adverse judgment which the novel makes on him is therefore arrived at with greater difficulty. He is conscious of his charm, of the winningness of his personal style, which has in it—as he knows—a large element of *natural* goodness and generosity. He is no less conscious of his lack of weight and solidity; his intense courtship of Fanny is, we may say, his effort to add the gravity of principle to his merely natural goodness. He becomes, however, the prey to his own charm, and in his cold flirtation with Maria Bertram he is trapped by his impersonation of passion—his role requires that he carry Maria off from a dull marriage to a life of boring concupiscence. It is his sister's refusal to attach any moral importance to this event that is the final proof of her deficiency in seriousness. Our modern impulse to resist the condemnation of sexuality and of sexual liberty cannot properly come into play here, as at first we think it should. For it is not sexuality that is being condemned, but precisely that form of a-sexuality that incurred D. H. Lawrence's greatest scorn—that is, sexuality as a game, or as a drama, sexuality as an expression of mere will or mere personality, as a sign of power, or prestige, or autonomy: as, in short, an impersonation and an insincerity.

A passage in one of her letters of 1814, written while *Mansfield Park* was in composition, enforces upon us how personally Jane Austen was involved in the question of principle as against personality, of character as against style. A young man has been paying court to her niece Fanny Knight, and the girl is troubled by, exactly, the effect of his principledness on his style. Her aunt's comment is especially interesting because it contains an avowal of sympathy with Evangelicism, an opinion which is the reverse of that which she had expressed in a letter of 1809 and had represented in *Pride and Prejudice*, yet the religious opinion is but incidental to the affirmation that is being made of the moral advantage of the profession of principle, whatever may be its effect on the personal style.

Mr. J. P.—has advantages which do not often meet in one person. His only fault indeed seems Modesty. If he were less modest, he would

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be more agreeable, speak louder & look Impudenter;—and is it not a fine Character of which Modesty is the only defect?—I have no doubt that he will get more lively & more like yourselves as he is more with you;—he will catch your ways if he belongs to you. And as to there being any objection from his *Goodness,* from the danger of his becoming Evangelical, I cannot admit *that.* I am by no means convinced that we ought not all to be Evangelicals, & am at least persuaded that they who are so from Reason and Feeling, must be happiest & safest. Do not be frightened from the connection by your Brothers having most wit. Wisdom is better than Wit, & in the long run will certainly have the laugh on her side; & don't be frightened by the idea of his acting more strictly up to the precepts of the New Testament than others.

The great charm, the charming greatness, of *Pride and Prejudice* is that it permits us to conceive of morality as style. The relation of Elizabeth Bennet to Darcy is real, is intense, but it expresses itself as a conflict and reconciliation of styles: a formal rhetoric, traditional and rigorous, must find a way to accommodate a female vivacity, which in turn must recognize the principled demands of the strict male syntax. The high moral import of the novel lies in the fact that the union of styles is accomplished without injury to either lover.

Jane Austen knew that *Pride and Prejudice* was a unique success and she triumphed in it. Yet as she listens to her mother reading aloud from the printed book, she becomes conscious of her dissatisfaction with one element of the work. It is the element that is likely to delight us most, the purity and absoluteness of its particular style.

> The work [she writes in a letter to her sister Cassandra] is rather too light, and bright, and sparkling; it wants to be stretched out here and there with a long chapter of sense, if it could be had; if not, of solemn specious nonsense, about something unconnected with the story; an essay on writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparté, or anything that would form a contrast, and bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness and epigrammatism of the general style.

Her overt concern, of course, is for the increase of the effect of the "general style" itself, which she believes would have been heightened by contrast. But she has in mind something beyond this technical improvement—her sense that the novel is a genre that must not try for

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the shining outward perfection of style, that it must maintain a degree of roughness of texture, a certain hard literalness, that, for the sake of its moral life, it must violate its own beauty by incorporating some of the irreducible prosy actuality of the world. It is as if she were saying of *Pride and Prejudice* what Henry James says of one of the characters of his story "Crapy Cornelia": "Her grace of ease was perfect, but it was all grace of ease, not a single shred of it grace of uncertainty or of difficulty."*

*Mansfield Park,* we may conceive, was the effort to encompass the grace of uncertainty and difficulty. The idea of morality as achieved style, as grace of ease, is not likely ever to be relinquished, not merely because some writers will always assert it anew, but also because morality itself will always insist on it—at a certain point in its development, morality seeks to express its independence of the grinding necessity by which it is engendered, and to claim for itself the autonomy and gratuitousness of art. Yet the idea is one that may easily deteriorate or be perverted. Style, which expresses the innermost truth of any creation or action, can also hide the truth; it is in this sense of the word that we speak of "mere style." *Mansfield Park* proposes to us the possibility of this deception. If we perceive this, we cannot say that the novel is without irony—we must say, indeed, that its irony is more profound than that of any of Jane Austen's novels.

In the investigation of the question of character as against

* This may be the place to remark that although the direct line of descent from Jane Austen to Henry James has often been noted, and although there can be no doubt of the lineage, James had a strange misconception of the nature of the art of his ancestress. "Jane Austen, with her light felicity," he says in *The Lesson of Balzac,* "leaves us hardly more curious of her process, or of the experience that fed it, than the brown thrush who tells his story from the garden bough." He says of her reputation (in 1905) that it is higher than her intrinsic interest and attributes it to "the body of publishers, editors, illustrators, producers of the present twaddle of magazines, who have found their 'dear', our dear, everybody's dear, Jane so infinitely to their material purpose." An acid response to the "dear Jane" myth is always commendable, but it seems to have led James into a strange obtuseness: "The key to Jane Austen's fortune with posterity has been in part the extraordinary grace of her facility, in part of her unconsciousness. . . ." This failure of perception (and syntax) is followed by an unhappy metaphor of Jane Austen musing over her "work-basket, her tapestry flowers, in the spare, cool drawing-room of other days." Jane Austen was, it need scarcely be said at this date, as little unconscious as James himself either in her intentions or (as her remarks about the style of *Pride and Prejudice* show) in her "process."

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personality, of principle as against style and grace of ease as against grace of difficulty, it is an important consideration that the Crawfords are of London. Their manner is the London manner, their style is the *chic* of the metropolis. The city bears the brunt of our modern uneasiness about our life. We think of it as being the scene and the cause of the loss of the simple integrity of the spirit—in our dreams of our right true selves we live in the country. This common mode of criticism of our culture is likely to express not merely our dissatisfaction with our particular cultural situation but our dislike of culture itself, or of any culture that is not a folk culture, that is marked by the conflict of interests and the proliferation and conflict of ideas. Yet the revulsion from the metropolis cannot be regarded merely with skepticism; it plays too large and serious a part in our literature to be thought of as nothing but a sentimentality.

To the style of London Sir Thomas Bertram is the principled antagonist. The real reason for not giving the play, as everyone knows, is that Sir Thomas would not permit it were he at home; everyone knows that a sin is being committed against the absent father. And Sir Thomas, when he returns before his expected time, confirms their consciousness of sin. It is he who identifies the objection to the theatricals as being specifically that of impersonation. His own self is an integer and he instinctively resists the diversification of the self that is implied by the assumption of roles. It is he, in his entire identification with his status and tradition, who makes of Mansfield Park the citadel it is—it exists to front life and to repel life's mutabilities, like the Peele Castle of Wordsworth's "Elegiac Verses," of which it is said that it is "cased in the unfeeling armour of old time." In this phrase Wordsworth figures in a very precise way the Stoic doctrine of *apatheia,* the principled refusal to experience more motion than is forced upon one, the rejection of sensibility as a danger to the integrity of the self.

Mansfield stands not only against London but also against what is implied by Portsmouth on Fanny's visit to her family there. Fanny's mother, Lady Bertram's sister, had made an unprosperous marriage, and the Bertrams' minimal effort to assist her with the burdens of a large family had been the occasion of Fanny's coming to live at Mansfield nine years before. Her return to take her place in a home not of actual poverty but of respectable sordidness makes one of the

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most engaging episodes of the novel, despite our impulse to feel that it ought to seem the most objectionable. We think we ought not be sympathethic with Fanny as, to her slow dismay, she understands that she cannot be happy with her own, her natural, family. She is made miserable by the lack of cleanliness and quiet, of civility and order. We jib at this, we remind ourselves that for the seemliness that does indeed sustain the soul, men too often sell their souls, that warmth and simplicity of feeling may go with indifference to disorder. But if we have the most elementary honesty, we feel with Fanny the genuine pain not merely of the half-clean and the scarcely tidy, of confusion and intrusion, but also of the vulgarity that thrives in these surroundings. It is beyond human ingenuity to define what we mean by vulgarity, but in Jane Austen's novels vulgarity has these elements: smallness of mind, insufficiency of awareness, assertive self-esteem, the wish to devalue, especially to devalue the human worth of other people. That Fanny's family should have forgotten her during her long absence was perhaps inevitable; it is a vulgarity that they have no curiosity about her and no desire to revive the connection, and this indifference is represented as being of a piece with the general indecorum of their lives. We do not blame Fanny when she remembers that in her foster father's house there are many rooms, that hers, although for years it had been small and cold, had always been clean and private, that now, although she had once been snubbed and slighted at Mansfield, she is the daughter of Sir Thomas's stern heart.

Of all the fathers of Jane Austen's novels, Sir Thomas is the only one to whom admiration is given. Fanny's real father, Lieutenant Price of the Marines, is shallow and vulgar. The fathers of the heroines of *Pride and Prejudice, Emma,* and *Persuasion,* all lack principle and fortitude; they are corrupted by their belief in their delicate vulnerability—they lack *apatheia.* Yet Sir Thomas is a father, and a father is as little safe from Jane Austen's judgment as he is from Shelley's. Jane Austen's masculine ideal is exemplified by husbands, by Darcy, Knightley, and Wentworth, in whom principle and duty consort with a ready and tender understanding. Sir Thomas's faults are dealt with explicitly—if he learns to cherish Fanny as the daughter of his heart, he betrays the daughters of his blood. Maria's sin and her sister Julia's bad disposition are blamed directly upon his

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lack of intelligence and sensibility. His principled submission to convention had issued in mere worldliness—he had not seen to it that "principle, active principle" should have its place in the rearing of his daughters, had not given them that "sense of duty which alone can suffice" to govern inclination and temper. He knew of no other way to counteract the low worldly flattery of their Aunt Norris than by the show of that sternness which had alienated them from him. He has allowed Mrs. Norris, the corrupter of his daughters and the persecutor of Fanny, to establish herself in the governance of his home; "she seemed part of himself."

So that Mansfield is governed by an authority all too fallible. Yet Fanny thinks of all that comes "within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park" as "dear to her heart and thoroughly perfect in her eyes." The judgment is not ironical. For the author as well as for the heroine, Mansfield Park is the good place—it is The Great Good Place. It is the house "where all's accustomed, ceremonious," of Yeats's "Prayer For His Daughter"—

*How but in custom and ceremony*
*Are innocence and beauty born?*

Yet Fanny's loving praise of Mansfield, which makes the novel's last word, does glance at ironies and encompasses ironies. Of these the chief is that Lady Bertram is part of the perfection. All of Mansfield's life makes reference and obeisance to Sir Thomas's wife, who is gentle and without spite, but mindless and moveless, concerned with nothing but the indulgence of her mild, inexorable wants. Middle-aged, stupid, maternal persons are favorite butts for Jane Austen, but although Lady Bertram is teased, she is loved. Sir Thomas's authority must be qualified and tutored by the principled intelligence, the religious intelligence—Fanny's, in effect—but Lady Bertram is permitted to live unregenerate her life of cushioned ease.

I am never quite able to resist the notion that in her attitude to Lady Bertram Jane Austen is teasing herself, that she is turning her irony upon her own fantasy of ideal existence as it presented itself to her at this time. It is scarcely possible to observe how *Mansfield Park* differs from her work that had gone before and from her work that was to come after without supposing that the difference points to a crisis in the author's spiritual life. In that crisis fatigue plays a great part—we are drawn to believe that for the

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moment she wants to withdraw from the exigent energies of her actual self, that she claims in fancy the right to be rich and fat and smooth and dull like Lady Bertram, to sit on a cushion, to be a creature of habit and an object of ritual deference, not to be conscious, especially not to be conscious of herself. Lady Bertram is, we may imagine, her mocking representation of her wish to escape from the requirements of personality.

It was Jane Austen who first represented the specifically modern personality and the culture in which it had its being. Never before had the moral life been shown as she shows it to be, never before had it been conceived to be so complex and difficult and exhausting. Hegel speaks of the "secularization of spirituality" as a prime characteristic of the modern epoch, and Jane Austen is the first to tell us what this involves. She is the first novelist to represent society, the general culture, as playing a part in the moral life, generating the concepts of "sincerity" and "vulgarity" which no earlier time would have understood the meaning of, and which for us are so subtle that they defy definition, and so powerful that none can escape their sovereignty. She is the first to be aware of the Terror which rules our moral situation, the ubiquitous anonymous judgment to which we respond, the necessity we feel to demonstrate the purity of our secular spirituality, whose dark and dubious places are more numerous and obscure than those of religious spirituality, to put our lives and styles to the question, making sure that not only in deeds but in *décor* they exhibit the signs of our belonging to the number of the secular-spiritual elect.

She herself is an agent of the Terror—we learn from her what our lives should be and by what subtle and fierce criteria they will be judged, and how to pass upon the lives of our friends and fellows. Once we have comprehended her mode of judgment, the moral and spiritual lessons of contemporary literature are easy—the metaphysics of "sincerity" and "vulgarity" once mastered, the modern teachers, Lawrence and Joyce, Yeats and Eliot, Proust and Gide, have but little to add save in the way of abstruse contemporary examples.

To what extremes the Terror can go she herself has made all too clear in the notorious passage in *Persuasion* in which she comments on Mrs. Musgrove's "large, fat sighings" over her dead scape-

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grace son. "Personal size and mental sorrow have certainly no necessary proportions," she says. "A large bulky figure has as good a right to be in deep affliction as the most graceful set of limbs in the world. But fair or not fair, there are unbecoming conjunctions, which reason will patronize in vain—which taste cannot tolerate, which ridicule will seize." We feel this to be unconscionable, and Henry James and E. M. Forster will find occasion to warn us that it is one of the signs of the death of the heart to regard a human being as an object of greater or less *vertù*; in fairness to Jane Austen we must remember that the passage occurs in the very novel which deals mercilessly with Sir Walter Elliot for making just this illegitimate application of taste to life. But although this aesthetic-spiritual snobbery is for Jane Austen a unique lapse, it is an extension, an extravagance, of her characteristic mode of judgment, and it leads us to see what is implied by the "secularization of spirituality," which requires of us that we judge not merely the moral act itself but also, and even more searchingly, the quality of the agent. This is what Hegel has in mind when he is at such pains to make his distinction between character and personality and to show how the development of the idea of personality is one of the elements of the secularization of spirituality. Dewey followed Hegel in this when, in his *Ethics,* he said that moral choice is not really dictated by the principle or the maxim that is applicable to the situation but rather by the "kind of selfhood" one wishes to "assume." And Nietzsche's conception of the Third Morality, which takes cognizance of the *real*—that is, the unconscious —intention of the agent, is the terrible instrument of criticism of this new development of the moral life. We are likely to feel that this placing of the personality, of the quality of being, at the center of the moral life is a chief glory of spirit in its modern manifestation, and when we take pleasure in Jane Austen we are responding to her primacy and brilliance in the exercise of this new mode of judgment. Yet we at times become aware of the terrible strain it imposes upon us, of the exhausting effort that the concept of personality requires us to make, and of the pain of exacerbated sensitivity to others, leading to the *disgust* which is endemic in our culture.

Jane Austen's primacy in representing this great and decisive mutation in the life of the spirit constitutes a large part of her claim to greatness. But in her representation of the modern situation *Mans-*

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*field Park* has a special place. It imagines the self safe from the Terror of secularized spirituality. In the person of Lady Bertram it affirms, with all due irony, the bliss of being able to remain unconscious of the demands of personality (it is a bliss which is a kind of virtue, for one way of being solid, simple, and sincere is to be a vegetable). It shuts out the world and the judgment of the world. The sanctions upon which it relies are not those of culture, of quality of being, of personality, but precisely those which the new conception of the moral life minimizes, the sanctions of principle, and it discovers in principle the path to the wholeness of the self which is peace. —When we have exhausted our anger at the offense which *Mansfield Park* offers to our conscious pieties, we find it possible to perceive how intimately it speaks to our secret inexpressible hopes.

## W. D. Snodgrass

## MHTIS....OU TIS

*for R. M. Powell*

He fed them generously who were his flocks,
Picked, shatterbrained, for food. Passed as a goat
Among his sheep, I cast off. Though hurled rocks
And prayers deranged by torment tossed our boat,
I could not silence, somehow, this defiant
Mind. From my fist into the frothed wake ran
The white eye's gluten of the living giant
I had escaped, by trickery, as no man.

Unseen where all seem stone blind, pure disguise
Has brought me home alone to No Man's land
To look at nothing I dare recognize.
My dead blind guide, you lead me here to claim
Still waters that will never wash my hand,
To kneel by my old face and know my name.

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E. V. Walter

# CONSERVATISM RECRUDESCENT: A CRITIQUE*

The conservative revival in America is a movement of opposition, a counter-revolution against the progressive movement and its fruits. In mid-century it dominates the intellectual scene just as progressivism and pragmatism dominated in the first decades. Trying to entrench itself as a majority position, it is groping for a philosophy that will give it intellectual leadership. Its major handicap in this search is its own genesis out of a milieu in which, as Lionel Trilling has observed, liberalism was not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition. Determined to conserve itself, conservatism today is attempting to crystallize a tradition out of the history of thought.

Critical response to this attempt is weak, although the number of writings in a conservative vein has reached epidemic proportions. There are few intransigent voices against the movement, and the silence is, I believe, symptomatic of the same serious pathology that has produced the conservative recrudescence.

Russell Kirk's recent book, *The Conservative Mind,* is a serious attempt to define conservatism. Not the least of Mr. Kirk's distinguished literary talents is his keen intuition for the appropriate word. The concluding chapter of his book is called the "Recrudescence of Conservatism." It is significant that the author should with unerring instinct apply the term "recrudescence" to the movement under discussion. Mr. Kirk has devoted a volume toward a definition of conservatism; I shall take only a little space to define "recrudescence." The Latin root and the meaning given by the Oxford Dictionary both signify a quality or state of breaking out again afresh, usually

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referring to a noxious condition such as disease or pestilence. Thus the meaning of the word suggests an analogy between conservatism and an epidemic and encourages borrowing some of the techniques of the epidemiologist; just as the latter tries to understand the basic patterns of pernicious disease, so we might analyze the structure of conservative thought to understand what its present resurgence implies. I shall also try to point out why I believe the neo-conservatives will fail in their attempt to gain intellectual leadership. Their failure is implied in deficiencies—some new and others ancient—inherent in the character and structure of conservative thought.

First of all, from an epistemological standpoint, one of the effects of the conservative virus is the toxic paralysis of reason. Although the conservatives assert they do not detest reason but would like to see more of it in political life, they want to be "realistic" and prefer to recognize that political behavior is ruled by force rather than by reason and discussion. Their "realism" expresses at least a half-truth about politics, but enlightened conservatives recognize that rule by force uncontrolled by reason and consent is a regime of nihilism which they say they do not want. Nevertheless, Sorel and others have spelled out for us the intimate relationships between nihilism, violence, and the anti-rational thought patterns that are called myth. On the other hand, if we believe that men are at least potentially rational and if we wish to develop this potential and stimulate or increase (as Mr. Kirk does) what rationality there is in politics, we cannot do it by telling men that it is naive or dangerous to believe that reason has anything to do with politics. Thus, the conservative (and here I am not speaking of mixed conservatives like Mr. Viereck but of those like Mr. Kirk whom I shall call "integral conservatives") who turns his back on reason and chooses to be moved solely by the impulses of tradition, prejudice, and prescription (these are Mr. Kirk's terms) invites a peril which Western civilization has struggled to escape for over two and a half millennia. This is the *political* danger of mythical thought.

I am not using myth here in a pejorative sense, but in the technical sense found in the distinguished writings of scholars like Cassirer, Frankfort, and others. Myth in this sense is a form of symbolic expression, an attempt to objectify social emotions and express them in symbolic form. It transcends poetry, however, in pro-

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claiming a truth and acting to bring about the truth it proclaims. It is a powerful though primitive form of thought containing an inner logic, and differing from rational thought by not being bound by the laws of consistency or the facts of experience, even if related to logic and experience.

The romanticism of what I have called "integral conservatism" displaces rational thought with mythical thought, just as its counterpart did in the nineteenth-century counter-revolution against the Enlightenment. Conservative irrationalism may have a strong appeal to many of us who are offended by over-rationalized life in dehumanized and impersonal industrial society, but it cannot command intellectual respect or provide a complete guide to political decision. For example, Mr. Kirk assures us that Providence manifests itself through "prejudices and traditions" and not our appetites. But we cannot help asking, *which* prejudices and *which* traditions? We cannot follow them all because there are cases in which they conflict. If reason is not to be trusted, how may we choose among them? Furthermore, in some cases it is difficult to distinguish our prejudices from our appetites. If reason is not the judge in these cases, how can we tell them apart?

The "logic-chopping" concerns of liberals, reformers and radicals, who may be painfully aware of the extent of ambiguity and complexity in the world, are scorned by the romantic conservative. Carping liberals and radicals with their labored discriminations might consider themselves bound by the rigorous requirements of evidence and the iron laws of consistency, but the romantic conservative is *legibus solutus*. Thus he sees utilitarians, positivists, radicals, reformers, socialists, and everyone else who is not identified with his own position as fused together in a single principle of evil. Perhaps the most unusual of these mystical unions is the marriage of John D. Rockefeller with Karl Marx; Mr. Kirk assures us that "Rockefeller and Marx were merely two agents of the same social force." Such sweeping fallacies of composition lead one to suspect that the "terrible simplifiers" whom Burckhardt feared are not all in the radical camp. Some of Mr. Kirk's paragraphs are like gas chambers, executing in one operation whole platoons of heterogeneous non-conservatives. In one notable place, Saint-Simon, Comte, Louis Blanc, Rathenau, Mannheim, Tugwell, Ewing, Bowles, and Sidney Webb are disposed of in a single paragraph.

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However, the non-conservatives who are demolished by conservative polemics are not the non-conservatives of real political life but merely phantasms; the mythical tendencies of conservative thought transform observation into fantasy. As perceived by Mr. Kirk, for example, the dialectic of social thought takes on the sharp contrasts of the morality play without some of its subtleties. The stage is a realm of darkness and light, of evil and good, of vice and virtue. The characters are either conservatives or anti-conservatives; the former are knights and the latter are dragons. The conservative knight, armored with decorum in his world of terror, would have us believe that the dragons which menace him—hideous, "many-headed, fire-breathing" and belching "Tartarean smoke"—are mainly of the species Sophister, Calculator, and Reformer. But if we are to avoid being drawn into his dream world we must remember that it is the ordinary sophister (not to be confused with the Great Horned Sophister of his imagination), the vulgar calculator (not the Saber-toothed Calculator), and the garden-variety reformer (not at all the Razor-back Reformer) who have kept bright in the minds of men the image of the good society.

The phantasms that lurk in the shadows of the conservative mind recall the words of monster Tom Paine who said of Edmund Burke (the patriarch of dragon-killers) that "In the rhapsody of his imagination [he] discovered a world of windmills, and his sorrows are that there are no Quixotes to attack them." But today, a century and a half later, there has grown up a great race of Quixotes, sired by the seed of Burke.

We need not be insensitive to the beauty and power of mythical thought to oppose its domination of political life. As Cassirer observes, Plato, one of the greatest mythmakers, became the professed enemy of myth in the political realm.[1] Plato's solution to the problem of justice should not be confused with his formulation of the question. The Republic itself was intensely conservative, but his dialectics were revolutionary. He demanded that the state be, first of all, *understood* and developed a method to search systematically for unifying principles. Then, he declared, a choice must be made between the ethical and the mythical conception of the state. The legal state, the state of justice, excludes mythological constructions.

1 *The Myth of the State,* p. 72 ff.

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Myth draws its vitality from the atmosphere of tradition. For the conservative, tradition is the guide to political decision, and political life decays if it is not nourished by tradition. The conservative also identifies morality with tradition. Thus both Burke and Hegel warned of the impossibility of reaching an individual morality or standard of conduct. As Hegel put it, "In regard to morality the saying of the wisest men of antiquity is the only true one—to be moral is to live in accordance with the moral traditions of one's country." But to construct moral and political life on tradition, Plato argued, meant building on shifting sands. In the *Phaedrus* he told us that the man who is impelled by tradition, proceeding by habit and routine, is blind. Tradition cannot guide him for it is blind itself, without a guiding principle, following impulses neither justified nor understood. Thus the blindness of tradition would be an impasse to the conservative if he had not invented a deus ex machina to deliver him from it. This device is teleology; he has given tradition direction from the highest source, namely Providence.

Together with his belief that the guiding hand of Providence ultimately controls political life, the conservative holds the belief that piety and veneration constitute the cornerstone of society. As Mr. Kirk asserts, religious sanction is "the indispensable basis of any conservative order." Mr. Viereck, too, makes it clear that a conservative outlook must be associated with religion.[2] But, we must ask, what kind of religion? The conservative answer leads us to suspect that it is the religion of the Roman pantheon.

Burke saw society as an immortal being, Mr. Kirk tells us, and believed that social disposition has a divine origin. Every state, Burke proclaimed, is the creation of Providence. Now this may be piety, but it is questionable whether it is religion. Mr. Kirk's assertion that "Christian orthodoxy is the kernel of Burke's philosophy," is hardly accurate. The further assertion that Burke's erudition supported "the verdict of the Christian fathers," would have surprised Tertullian and Augustine. It must not be forgotten that during the reign of the Emperor Domitian, the Christians called the state the beast from the abyss, and that a century later Celsus attacked the Christians because they were not loyal citizens and because they felt they belonged

2 *Conservatism Revisited: the Revolt Against Revolt,* p. 26.

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to another kingdom. Tertullian, also, declared: "Nothing is more foreign to us than affairs of state,"[3] and Augustine would hardly have agreed with Burke's claim that every state is the creation of God: some states he saw as closer to the Devil than to God. Thus, where conservative *pietas* is pagan and monistic, the early Fathers were dualistic and defended the claims of Christian conscience against the claims of the state.

Mr. Kirk observes that "An Hellenic piety, almost Platonic in its tone, suffuses Burke's declaration that the state is Divinely ordained." An Hellenic piety indeed and an Egyptian and Oriental piety too, but not a Christian or Judaic piety. Furthermore, Mr. Kirk overlooks the long tradition—and I emphasize tradition, for conservatives have no monopoly of it—of radical Christianity. Certainly, a conspicuous strain in ante-Nicene Christianity is the recurrent motif of separation from the state, opposition to the claims of the state to divinity, and the constant iteration that the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world.

Mr. Viereck, too, shows that when he invokes religion to stabilize society he is returning to the Roman pantheon. He asks for a humanist appreciation of all religious sentiments regardless of denomination. Mr. Viereck cautions against religion which is carried away by its own enthusiasms; dogmas, he says, should not be taken too literally. As Gertrude Himmelfarb has pointed out, "Utility, rather than any sectarian idea of truth, becomes his ultimate religious principle."[4] Thus, religion is devaluated from an ultimate end to a relative end, or even to a means to the end of social stability. When he indicates that he supports "religion as a humanist in the Erasmus tradition, not as a theologian," Mr. Viereck is expressing the spirit of Roman *pietas*.

But piety must be distinguished from religion. Piety is conservative, religion is not. Piety in the sense of Roman *pietas* is a complex of secular loyalties and civic virtues. As a substitute for religion it is epitomized in the Latin saying: "Pious is he who loves his country." The failure to distinguish between piety and religion, however, is a self-destructive weakness in conservatism. Recognizing

3 *Apology,* 38.

4 "The Prophets of the New Conservatism," *Commentary,* vol. IX (1950), p. 80.

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that piety is the substance from which custom and law is spun, and also that it is the impulse that gives inward assent to legality, conservatism prefers to make it the cornerstone of society. But by calling it religion and allowing religion to come in with it, conservatism leaves the door open to revolutionary forces. Hocking has pointed out that "Worship is the radical and deliberate cult of revolution. . . . The will which has met its god confronts the world with new tables of the law. . . . An honest religion is thus the natural ally of an honest revolution."[5] But the religious revolutionary differs from the nihilist by remaining responsible to his religious and ethical ideals.

Another serious deficiency of conservatism in the realm of religious thought is its naive conception of original sin. Today almost everyone chatters about original sin just as at one time almost everyone accepted the idea of progress. By a curious transvaluation and oversimplification, Reinhold Niebuhr, whose mind is really complex, has strangely been transformed into an inverted Condorcet for the 1950s. Nevertheless, if as Mr. Kirk, exegeting Edmund Burke, tells us, "the human heart, in reality, is the fountain of evil," does this judgment apply to the aristocracy too, or is that class less tainted with sin than the masses? Why are many conservatives quick to apply the category of original sin to presumptuous mass man, but slow to apply it to the aristocrat? It is almost as if they believe that aristocracy has been immaculately conceived.

Thus, all sorts of false deductions are made from the postulate of original sin. Just as slavery was once deduced from and justified by the idea of original sin instead of being identified with sin, now authoritarianism is found implied in original sin. But sin or radical evil in the sight of God may be ascribed to man because God is God and man is man, and there is an infinite distance between them. It is precisely this distance which brings about God's redemptive activity through Mediation. Between man and man, however, and between human groups and orders, the category of sin cannot apply because their distances are relative and not absolute. Nothing is changed even if the human order is considered as ordained by God. The concept of radical evil before God cannot be translated to that of being before earthly authorities. Thus, Martin Buber concludes,

5 *Man and the State,* p. 431.

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"No legitimate use can be made in politics or political theory of the concept of human sinfulness."[6]

Another important element in conservative thought is traditionalism. Mixed conservatism is selective and critical in its attitude toward tradition. Viereck, for example, uses an ethical standard to judge tradition: "Not all the past is worth keeping," he admits. But integral conservatism is distrustful of ethical or rational judgments of tradition and history. Integral conservatism bases its ethical position on traditionalism and historicism.

Now, tradition is an habitual pattern of thinking and acting, and as such is a fact of social life. But when habit is elevated as a guide to action and is given the obligatory quality of an "ought," the fact is transformed into a norm and becomes traditionalism. Thus, the legitimacy of a social order may be based on tradition. But, as Max Weber observed, there is absolutely nothing normative about habit as such, "It is either a mechanism or a concrete pattern of actual behavior, not a way men should act."[7]

By transforming a fact into a value, traditionalism leads to confusion. Usually, it sets up the maze of circular reasoning. Thus, if the conservative is asked, "Why should tradition be obeyed?" his answer is likely to be, "Because obedience to tradition is the condition of a well-ordered society." But if he is pursued with the question, "What is a well-ordered society?" the conservative replies, "One in which tradition is obeyed."

A similar error appears in conservative historicism. History becomes historicism when the fact of historical continuity is transformed into a norm. Conservative historicism applies to events the standard of continuous organic growth—what Viereck calls the "unbroken organic continuity of historical development."[8] But those who use this organic analogy would do well to heed Anton Menger's admonition to remember that "hurricanes and earthquakes are no less part of the regular course of nature than is the quiet growth of animals or plants."[9] Conservatives tend to overlook the fact that revolutions are part of history and as much a product of social forces

6 *Between Man and Man,* p. 77.
7 T. Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action,* p. 646.
8 "Liberals and Conservatives," *Antioch Review,* vol. XI (1951), p. 390.
9 Quoted in *Legal Philosophies of Lask, Radbruch and Dabin,* p. 62.

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as periods of stability. Historical continuity is not a norm but a method of cognition. An event is perceived as historical if it is demonstrated as a continuation of the historical process. Thus, gradualness is a category of cognition through which an event is seen as historical. Therefore, any event which is historical (even the most revolutionary and untraditional) may be shown to have its roots in the social and historical past. But to apply history as a norm and to demand that in politics actors must regard themselves as bound by history brings history itself to a standstill. "The error of all historicism, then, rests on elevating a category of historical cognition to a norm of political action."[10]

Political problems are problems of value, and history by itself gives no answer to these problems. To affirm all of history is to affirm the evil that is mixed with the good. To find an answer to political problems from an examination of history is actually to go beyond history to ethics, perhaps to a concealed crypto-ethic. To select facts from history implies a principle of selection which in turn is based on a value system. In some cases values are selected from the golden age of some idealized version of a pre-industrial period. Thus there are utopian conservatives as well as utopian radicals. But nothing is gained by attacking utopian visions of the future and replacing them with fantasies about the past.

Iron-clad traditionalism and historicism raise the question of human freedom, which leads to the conservative view of man and society. In many forms of conservative thought (*mutatis mutandis*, in ancient Hellenic writings as well as those of contemporaries like Ortega) the individual is conceived as the representative of a type. He is considered free to develop only according to the potential and the limits the law of his type determines for him. But it would be dangerous to the security of institutions, the conservative believes, to allow individuals themselves to interpret and determine what constitutes their own inner law of development. Therefore, the inner law is objectified and its locus is found in the existing structure of social orders and classes. In order to prevent conflict between the individual principles of development of the various classes and com-

10 *Ibid.*

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munities, these are subsumed under and made subordinate to the all-inclusive principle of the state.[11] Thus, it is assumed that the freedom of each individual is not inconsistent with the hierarchical organization of society. And it is also assumed that it would be a violation of the individual's freedom and happiness to wrench him from his established place in the hierarchical arrangement.

Of course, conservatism is not the only position that is interested in the security of institutions. The conserving purpose by itself does not distinguish, in most cases, one political philosophy from another. The end of political institutions themselves is conservation and security. But the conservative idea fixes limits to the flexibility of institutions and insists on their conformity to established models. In its extreme form it goes beyond respect for tradition and elevates tradition to a principle of control, extending to the dead the prescriptive right to govern the living. The result is a mood which condemns as pernicious every tendency to innovation and engenders a fear and hatred of social change, regardless of its character and potential.[12] Those who oppose innovation tend to identify order with the immutability of established conventions. Such an identification fails to deal with the problems of power and change on any but a temporary basis, and its inelasticity may lead to the destruction of the entire order by the pressures of irresistible, dynamic social forces.

Hierarchically organized society creates at least as many problems as it attempts to solve. And uncritical veneration of traditional social institutions solves none at all, for these are just as much spawned by the evil that is said to lurk in the human heart as by the good. There is much truth in the insight of Tolstoy and Berdyaev that there is original sin in history, and that society is constructed on falsehoods and injustice.[13] But even mixed conservatives like Viereck, who admit that the accretion of law and tradition combines good and evil in inextricable confusion, hold that it is the duty of the conservative to sanction the presence of evil rather than endanger the institutional structure.

Where non-conservative thought usually stresses freedom, con-

11 Cf. K. Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology,* p. 107.
12 Cf. C. N. Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture,* p. 104.
13 Cf. N. Berdyaev, *Slavery and Freedom,* p. 12.

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servatism emphasizes limitation. Mr. Kirk summarizes "this ancient conservative principle (which Burke expresses better than anyone else) . . . that the purpose of the state is to govern those that are not fit to govern themselves," and claims with Burke that laws and social institutions are a restraint upon man's "lower nature." Furthermore, Mr. Viereck has said that the psychological difference between liberals and conservatives is the "split between those who trust the 'natural goodness' of man and primarily want to release it from *outer* restraints, and those who fear its 'natural' caveman propensities and want to check it with *inner* restraints." As usual, Mr. Viereck has missed the real problem and has substituted for it a false disjunction. Realistic non-conservatives are aware of the necessity for restraints upon man's lower nature, but they are also painfully aware of the way tyrannical and evil controls corrupt his higher nature.

In a recent review of Mr. Kirk's book, Gordon Chalmers says he believes that the author has summed up most political problems in the question: Do men have souls or do they not? Upon one's resolution of this inquiry rests the basis of politics, he concludes, and if the answer is no, men will then be treated as parts of a machine.[14] This much may be true, but the question does not go far enough. It should continue to ask: What are we to do when we recognize that men do have souls? The conservative answer may be just as inhuman as that of the materialist. By identifying the principle of a man's soul with the principle of the social order, and by requiring that his own individual law of development be determined for him by the state, a conservative regime enslaves him as effectively as any machine. Conservatism would impress on the soul of man its own structure and deprive the soul of the autonomy which is its life. Thus, although it may begin as a revolt against mechanism, conservatism ends in coercive organicism.

Finally, the new conservatives show great concern of rootlessness and the need for roots, but where in America can they themselves find a class with which to identify? There is no pre-capitalist aristocracy they can choose, and they clearly reject the aristocracy of wealth because it offers no cultural leadership. There is no concrete social stratum which serious conservatives may select as a para-

14 *New York Times Book Review,* May 16, 1953, p. 7.

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digm. Therefore, they are led to create a disembodied aristocracy, an aristocracy of the spirit. Their pathos, then, is contained in this ironic situation: that in their great concern over rootlessness they are men without roots, the true *déracinés*.

To sum up, some major deficiencies of conservative thought are the tendency to substitute myth for reason, the confusion of piety with religion and the false conclusions drawn from the idea of original sin, the logical and ethical errors of traditionalism and historicism, and the errors of its psychology and anthropology (which are really implied in its rigid conception of man, society, and especially of human freedom). These weaknesses are, I believe, among those that will lead neo-conservatism to fail in its bid for intellectual leadership.

**Louis O. Coxe**

## WATCHING WATER

Who waits by water looking down
Shall fastened to his image stay—
A seaman with a sky to drown,
Flukes in the heavens, limbs aweigh.

Unshifting, windless, afternoon
Decants him filling up the hours:
Evening unseals a tumbler moon
And sluices daylight out in showers.

And livelong lying all night long
He feels tomorrow soak the grass
While submarine the white-throat's song
Bells like a secret under glass.

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Patricia Coombs

# SECONDARY LANDSCAPE

I

The cloud was humped and vague
Above the scene; yet by that
Vagueness and the way it hung
Slightly eastward of the tree,
It gave the scene a certainty
The sun, exhausted, must deny.
Imperfect as the light from
Which he flew, a blackbird sat
In judgment on a branch.
His eye, triangular at noon,
Fixed on an empty milk-weed pod.
An hour passed; then two.
The cloud moved slightly
Northward of the tree until
The bird, whose voice was harsh,
Cried out with warning.

II

A man, entering the landscape
From another direction, examined
Various fungi on a stump: some
Were delicate and brown and
The under-sides white as fluted
Silk; others bore flecks of
Singular color, and all were
Gathered thick and soft as moths
Sleeping on a stick.
He left a patched coat hanging
Near the rock, and if he heard
The blackbird of distance
Crying out, he did not turn nor

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Try to guess what error fell
Among those decadent, dry leaves.

III

A wind, thin and intricate as veins,
Moved the cloud and cast a subtle change:
The shadow from the tree grew long
And dark across the ground until
It touched, at last, the shadow
Of the man. Among the rocks
Another shadow formed, a shape
Both tree and rock and man.
The light grew square, then oblong,
Almost round. The day, for all
Its journey, was thus undone.
The blackbird sat until the scene
Decayed, man and shadow gone,
Reflecting, in his closing eye
The falseness of the sun,
The doubt eternal in the seed.

## Allen Mandelbaum

## UPON THE THEME OF PATRIA

Upon the theme of *patria,*
three dedicated trumpeters
cheered the ragged athlete,
weary in the mountain-passes,
fizzled torches in his head,
the drear night coming, sore
fetlocks, the heart that crowds
the hollow of the body beating
sweat and fear on drums of ear.

O trumpeters to marathon
who sleep below the dream,
o lyrists in the word asleep

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who sing the golden seeming,
and all the valley choirs
forever trebly echoing
the same self-damned refrain:
the mist lies in the valley, too,
the chill will soon be ours,
and ours, the body valley-borne,
that holds its tongue and will not scorn
our trumpets, drums, our lyres.

## Scott Bates

# BESTIARY

### I The Sparrow

The sparrow breaks
like a twisted spring
the thorn of the white rose
in his wing.

An infinite universe
of eyes
like ebony suns
in harried skies.

The bluejay falls
like the sky and spears
the remaining harmony
of the spheres.

### II The Ermine

The swiftest hare
will bare his throat
to the coolest killer
in the ermine coat

who will scarcely pause
to taste the flow

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like strawberry jam
on the vanilla snow

before he slips
to his hole again
like phthisical spit
slipping down a drain

to bury beneath
the weight of trees
his appetite
or his disease.

## III The Mole

Beneath the flesh
of autumn flames
in screaming Joyce
between the James

below the Proust
of roots unleaving
under mammoths
mammoths breathing

under heaving
boulders blinder
where willows dine
and thunder wanders

gnaws a dumber
wonder wilder
reaming springing
hills and founders

down and deeper
under under
lice and Paradise
asunder

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Thomas Greene

# THE RELEVANCE OF LAUTRÉAMONT

Lautréamont has been read and discussed spasmodically in America for some years now, but despite his continental reputation he has not as yet a "public" here. One has to remember, however, that the Lautréamont cult in France, fervent and extreme as it has been, developed only after a near-total blackout of appreciation which lasted almost forty years. *Maldoror* is a hard book to evaluate; depending on the quality of the light the reader's mind sheds upon it, it can appear very good or very bad. French enthusiasm moreover may have been due partly to the enigmatic figure of the writer himself, as well as to the sensational elements in his book.

"Le Comte de Lautréamont" was the pseudonym of a young man named Isidore Ducasse, born in Uruguay of French parents, who lived in Paris for a few years, totally unknown, before his death at twenty-four in 1870. The first canto of *Maldoror,* which might be described as an epic prose-poem divided into brief discontinuous episodes, had appeared in print two years before, and at his death Lautréamont was at work upon a book of poems, only the prose preface of which survives. This preface is now called, illogically, *Poésies. Maldoror* and *Poésies,* together with six letters, constitute the *Oeuvres Complètes* of Isidore Ducasse, "Comte de Lautréamont."

One of the central enigmas in the over-all biographical mystery lies in the fact of Lautréamont's youth. This is enigmatic because his book is as good as it is. On the other hand, it explains a great deal, not only of *Maldoror's* sophomorism and bad taste, but also of its brilliance. Eliot's remark on Tourneur is entirely a propos.

> [*The Revenger's Tragedy*] does express—and this, chiefly, is what gives it its amazing unity—an intense and unique and horrible vision of life; but it is such a vision as might come, as the result of few or slender experiences, to a highly sensitive adolescent with a gift for words.

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This might have been written of Lautréamont; it is only necessary to add that Lautréamont's "few or slender experiences" were probably composed in large part by the reading of Romantic literature—in particular Poe, Byron, Baudelaire, the Gothic novelists, and their imitators. It does not seem coincidental that Lautréamont, like the Tourneur surmised by Eliot, was young; his youthful intensity appears to have ridden his talent and his misanthropy to produce a book whose virtues, whatever its faults, might have been unattainable by a maturer man.

It is precisely because he was young that Lautréamont's voracious reading of the Romantics influenced him as strongly as it did. His relationship to the Romantic movement has tended to be blurred in France by the emphasis on his relationship to Surrealism, and yet *Maldoror* points backward as well as forward. Many passages seem at first reading uninspired reworkings of hackneyed Romantic material. But even in these passages the tone betrays itself with a pomposity or absurdity that turns the Romantic ardor into bathos. At this stage one concludes that the whole book is an enormous piece of Romantic irony. But this conclusion is not really accurate either. The truth might be better stated by saying that *Maldoror* assumes the full responsibility for attitudes which many romantics only play at; it pushes Romantic ideas and Romantic poses to their extremes. Sometimes it pushes them into absurdity, sometimes into ugliness, sometimes into a kind of splendor. It pushes Romantic irony to *its* extreme, to the point that the seriousness of a situation is always jeopardized without being destroyed. Ultimately the question of a given passage's seriousness is unanswerable.

In this sense *Maldoror* is rather a book about Romantic literature than a book about "life," and as such it is an extremely illuminating study. It may be that you could understand Byron better by reading *Maldoror,* where his name is never mentioned, than by reading any number of critical or biographical analyses. On a conscious level Lautréamont may have read Byron superficially and imperceptively, but as a writer he produced a searching anatomy of Byron's role and his poetry.

Perhaps because of this integrity, this fidelity to the responsibilities of Romanticism, Lautréamont succeeded in realizing the destructive impulse which had driven and misdriven his literary prede-

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cessors as it was to drive his disciples. In all the literature of revolt few books succeed in destroying so well as *Maldoror*. If it were only superficially shocking, cheaply sensational, it could be easily dismissed. It is certainly these things among others. But as a whole it is a profoundly unsettling book. From its symphonic opening sentence which warns off the innocent or casual reader, it follows the strategy of outrage: the outrage of morality, which is Lautréamont's peculiar comedy; the outrage of nature, which is his peculiar violence; the outrage of language, which is his peculiar rhetoric. A blend of comedy, violence and rhetoric produces that bitter savor which only a few, wrote Lautréamont, can taste without danger.

## II

*Les Chants de Maldoror* dramatize the existence of a hero who is nominally committed to evil and whose record of assault and murder provides the narrative pretext for most of its episodes. In the phantasmagorical universe of which he is the center, Maldoror is hostile to virtually everything: in his Machiavellian ravages of the innocent few and the brutalized many among his fellow men he is only a little less implacable than in his feud with an extraordinarily disagreeable and anthropomorphic God. Some of the most sensational episodes which describe the forms of Maldoror's sadism are repellent and disgusting; they contain passages which one does not willingly reread. But Maldoror's sadism, and even the sadism of these extreme episodes, is at least partly redeemed by a psychological denseness about him, a queer paradoxical ambivalence which qualifies even the most brutal and forthright of his acts.

The first paradox in Maldoror's psychology is his moral consciousness. All the events of his universe are charged with profound ethical significance for him, and he seems to respond almost entirely to ethical motives—to disgust for the brutality of God and man on the one hand, to remorse for his own brutality on the other. His sexual aggressions often seem motivated less by physical impulse than by a fanatic will of almost Puritanical sternness and earnestness. It is a kind of moral indignation, a perverted Calvinism, which turns Maldoror away from God and man and drives him to seek the sin which is absolutely unprovoked and hideous, the sin which is the perfect crime.

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In his awareness of innocence, in his protest against authority and in the solitude of his individualism, Maldoror embodies most of the tenets of Romantic morality. The influence of the Satan of Milton, whom we know Lautréamont to have read, and probably of Mary Shelley's monster in *Frankenstein,* which he would seem to have read from internal evidence, played roles in the conception of Maldoror, but by far his most direct ancestor was the Byronic hero as typified by Lara, Cain, Manfred and the Corsair. Lautréamont mentions each of these characters at various points in the *Poésies,* and in *Maldoror* he borrowed feelings and attitudes they all embody—the nervous fatigue, the sense of isolation, the thirst for the superhuman with its concomitant frustration. Byron had written in *Lara*:

*Too high for common selfishness, he could*
*At times resign his own for others' good,*
*But not in pity, not because he ought,*
*But in some strange perversity of thought,*
*That sway'd him onward with a secret pride*
*To do what few or none would do beside;*
*And this same impulse would, in tempting time,*
*Mislead his spirit equally to crime;*
*So much he soar'd beyond, or sunk beneath*
*The men with whom he felt condemn'd to breathe,*
*And long'd by good or ill to separate*
*Himself from all who shar'd his mortal state.*

This becomes in Lautréamont:

*Hélas! qu'est-ce donc que le bien et le mal? Est-ce une même chose par laquelle nous témoignons avec rage notre impuissance, et la passion d'atteindre à l'infini par les moyens même les plus insensés?*

Maldoror's insensate rage for cruelty and suffering is a kind of misdirected aspiration for the infinite.

The urge "by good or ill to separate himself" from those who share his mortal state underlies most of Maldoror's behavior. The very fact of his humanity is in doubt throughout the book; sometimes he would seem to belong to the class of sinister, demonic, invulnerable personages who people Romantic literature from Maturin's

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Melmoth through Polidor's Vampire and Hugo's Han d'Islande to Sue's Wandering Jew. Maldoror himself is not always sure of his own condition. This uncertainty heightens his Byronic urge to be different from human beings.

From the ambivalence of this uncertainty Lautréamont derives some of his most grotesque comedy, comedy which characteristically concludes with the chastening recognition that Maldoror is indeed human. See for instance Maldoror's long address to the sea—perhaps the most polished and controlled single episode of the book—in which his impulse toward the super- or sub-human is confronted with this recognition of his human condition. The episode consists of a declamation divided into ten sections, each of which is concluded with the refrain *"Je te salue, vieil océan!"* The whole is prefaced by an injunction to the reader who, being human, will probably prove too weak and too excitable to enjoy it anyway.

*Je me propose, sans être ému, de déclamer à grande voix la strophe sérieuse et froide que vous allez entendre. Vous, faites attention à ce qu'elle ne manquera pas de laisser, comme une flétrissure, dans vos imaginations troublées. . . . Il n'y a pas longtemps que j'ai revu la mer et foulé le pont des vaisseaux, et mes souvenirs sont vivaces comme si je l'avais quittée la veille. Soyez néanmoins, si vous le pouvez, aussi calmes que moi, dans cette lecture que je me repens déjà de vous offrir, et ne rougissez pas à la pensée de ce qu'est le coeur humain.*[1]

Beneath the cold formality of a passage like this one lies a faint reminiscence of French classical tragedy. But basically the passage evokes the classical declamation only to parody it, and there is a buffoonishness about Maldoror's pose which qualifies, but never destroys, the significance of what follows. In particular the pose of disdainful condescension to the human—and therefore inferior—reader, announces the sardonic comedy which is to underly the

1 I propose to proclaim in a loud voice and without emotion the cold and grave chant that you are about to hear. Consider carefully what it contains and guard yourself against the painful impression it cannot fail to leave like a blight upon your troubled imaginings . . . Not long ago I saw the sea once again and trod upon the bridges of ships; my memories of it are as lively as if it had all happened yesterday. If you are able, however, be as calm as I am as you read what is to follow (for already I regret offering it to you) and do not blush for the human heart. (*Translations by Guy Wernham, from the New Directions edition.*)

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whole episode. The implication of Maldoror's non-humanity is continued in each of the following apostrophes to the sea, which is always compared favorably with the derisory and feeble race of man. These progressively extended and rhetorical apostrophes culminate in the climactic question to which they have been tending: *"Réponds-moi, océan, veux-tu être mon frère?"* As though in answer, the sea surges up in a magnificent series of waves, before which Maldoror, in a burst of terror and awe, prostrates himself, thus losing ironically his vaunted frigidity.

*Oh! quand tu t'avances, la crête haute et terrible, entouré de tes replis tortueux comme d'une cour, magnétiseur et farouche, roulant tes ondes les unes sur les autres, avec la conscience de ce que tu es, pendant que tu pousses, des profondeurs de ta poitrine, comme accablé d'un remords intense que je ne puis pas découvrir, ce sourd mugissement perpétuel que les hommes redoutent tant, même quand ils te contemplent, en sûreté, tremblants sur le rivage, alors, je vois qu'il ne m'appartient pas, le droit insigne de me dire ton égal.*[2]

The recognition of his inferiority to the sea, and the resulting implication of his human condition, produces a spasm of rage in Maldoror which yields in its turn to resignation, resignation to a life in human society even though that life must be ridiculous. *"Faisons un grand effort, et accomplissons, avec le sentiment du devoir, notre destinée sur cette terre. Je te salue, vieil océan!"* This, the conclusion of the episode, reveals a sudden humility which renders the preceding comedy more warm and more significant.

If Maldoror is repeatedly faced with the fact of his own humanity, he is also faced with his difference from most of his fellow men. The divergent sensibility which sets off the Romantic hero from an unfeeling society is parodied by the cumbersome inflexibility of Maldoror's mental processes. At moments he is actually pedantic and toward the end of the book he lapses into stretches of unreadable

2 Oh, when you advance, your crest high and terrible, surrounded by your tortuous coils as by a royal court, magnetic and wild, rolling your waves one upon the other, full of the consciousness of what you are; and when you give utterance from the depths of your bosom as if you were suffering the pangs of some intense remorse which I have been unable to discover, to that perpetual heavy roar so greatly feared by men even when, trembling on the shore, they contemplate you in safety: then I perceive that I do not possess that signal right to name myself your equal.

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double talk which mimic the hyper-precision of scientific jargon. He is, moreover, incapable of laughter. *"Moi, je ne sais pas rire. Je n'ai jamais pu rire, quoique plusieurs fois j'aie essayé de le faire. C'est très difficile d'apprendre à rire."* Once, in a grotesque attempt to imitate his fellows, Maldoror widens the corners of his mouth with his penknife to force it into a laugh. For an instant he believes that he has succeeded, but presently, through the falling blood, he recognizes that he has failed. This terrible and brilliant image dramatizes in its insane way the spiritual isolation of the Romantic hero and all his clumsy maladjustment with a power which few Romantic poets equaled. Maldoror's illogicality, which is really an excess of misplaced logic, translates the apparent illogicality of his hyper-conscious moral sensibility.

Thus the comedy of *Maldoror* dwells on the conflict between the pro-human and anti-human motives of the Romantic hero-saint. Ultimately of course the hero fails to be a saint, as he has to fail; the pressures upon him are too confusing, his own behavior too ambiguous, to permit him the purity either of the perfect martyrdom or the perfect crime. But his conflict leads him to repeated essays, and the elements which I have called comic are interwoven with elements of sickening violence. It is as though Maldoror had taken upon himself to dramatize an epigram which his creator could not possibly have read, this remark from the *Journaux Intimes* of Baudelaire: *"Quand j'aurai inspiré le dégoût et l'horreur universels, j'aurai conquis la solitude."*

## III

The outrage of nature in *Maldoror* can be discussed first of all in its most obvious sense: the natural laws which operate in the "real" universe are twisted to conform to the laws of the myth or the fairy tale. There are magic spells, enchantments and punishments; there are animals who speak and act as humans; there is an anthropomorphic God as well as other divinities and spirits who interfere actively and visibly in human affairs; and there are frequent metamorphoses of man into animal or monster, of God into animal—once, as it happens, a church lamp becomes an angel. These elements confer a primitive, folk-lorist quality to the book which is

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essential to it.[3] Beneath the obvious mannerisms of the ambitious self-conscious young writer who wants to make a name, there is a frightening barbarity in *Maldoror,* a relaxing of intellectual control and the consequent release of savage subconscious pressures.

The relationship of *Maldoror* to the folk tale is all the closer in that narrative conventions drawn from legend and romance, familiar to the point of being archetypal, are used in many of the episodes. In one of these, Maldoror is vampirized every night for ten years by a spider which seems to live in his chamber wall. One night as Maldoror lies paralyzed, the stomach of the spider opens and two young men step out of it, each wearing a blue robe and bearing a flaming sword. The youths are Reginald and Elsseneur, once beloved friends of Maldoror whom he betrayed in turn. Reginald he had attacked with his super-fine stiletto once as they were swimming in the sea; the unfortunate youth had resigned his soul to heaven when he was luckily rescued by fishermen. Elsseneur he had led off seductively on a solitary promenade whereupon he drew his knife and ordered the young man to prepare to die. If a herd of bulls had not happened by at that instant, Elsseneur would have breathed his last. Both youths, in disillusion, sought death in battle and became redoubtable warriors; one day they met on the battlefield and engaged in a long personal duel. After a heroic contest they finally paused to catch their breath and, raising their visors, recognized each other. They swore eternal friendship. An archangel from heaven ordered them to take the form of a spider and suck Maldoror's blood for ten years. Now the spell has been rescinded. Maldoror awakes from his paralysis and sees two forms disappearing into the sky.

The relationship of such a story to legend or romance is obvious. What may be less obvious from my retelling is its sophistication. Without violating the autonomy of the magical conventions Lautréamont underlines the elements which render them relevant and suggestive. Elsseneur's promenade with Maldoror, for instance, is recounted in

3 Even the constant interweaving and interpenetration of themes and images recall faintly the manifold variations of folk legends. Like the illiterate bard, Lautréamont tells and retells what is essentially the same story with variations drawn from a stockpile of common elements. But this story—the hero's suffering, resentment, retaliation and remorse—never finds its definitive form and *Maldoror* is without a proper conclusion.

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such a way as to blend the mechanism of legend with the mechanism of a dream. The walk which begins as a stroll through an exhilarating and odorant Moorish landscape modulates with brilliant detail to a furtive, exhausting and nocturnal trek across a mystifying wilderness. The landscape changes, light falls from the sky, joy yields to terror with the frightening swiftness and illogic of dream progression.

This audacity of illogical juxtaposition is marked throughout the book. The magical phenomena which do violence to physical laws also do violence to each other from page to page, and similarly the atmosphere and décor of the action vary qualitatively. The décors are drawn alike from the common daylit streets of Paris and from the most Dantesque phantasmagorical scenery of pure imagination. The effect of Lautréamont's heterogeneity is something like the effect of a surrealist film: the distance shot of a recognizable landscape may give way to a focus on a mystifying detail, or conversely interest in the close-up may delay the irrelevant backdrop from looming out of the vagueness. What holds all this material together is the formal stylization which Lautréamont imposes on it, a stylization which is the product of a very individual and cohesive sensibility. It is impossible to read even the most sophomoric pages of *Maldoror* without recognizing the distinctive imagination behind them.

Within this stylization the most unnerving violence has to be assimilated—the copulation with a shark, the penknife rape of a little girl, the flagellation of a man hung by his hair. As I have admitted, some of this violence functions in the book only to shock and to disgust. But in other cases, and particularly in certain episodes of the latter half of the book, the violence is realized without shock, so that it finds an integrity and integration in Lautréamont's grotesque but coherent universe. In these episodes the stylization imposed by the poet's vision seems to demand violence and to contain it naturally. I am thinking of the Kafkaesque story, among others, in which a man is metamorphosed by a sorceress into a beetle. In this episode and others like it there is so little an attempt at the obvious facile *scandale* that some passages make heavy reading; the style becomes plodding and ponderous, in imitation of the weight of time itself in this universe. When such an assimilation of violence to stylization is achieved, we have the right, I think, to be impressed; the artistic control which Lautréamont wins on occasion over his material—repellent, incongruous and extravagant as it is—is the kind of victory

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common to the most gifted creative imaginations, to Dante and to Joyce and not to many others.

## IV

The stylization of *Maldoror* is due in part to the texture of the language itself. The language imposes itself upon the reader's consciousness with an insistence typical of poetry rather than prose, and there can be no doubt that the book as a whole has to be described as a prose poem. There are kinds of eccentricities and audacities which simple prose cannot contain.

I have mentioned above the dense convoluted passages which mimic scientific jargon. Many of the stylistic liberties in *Maldoror* seem to take off from this same starting-place—the satire of academic inflexibility. We know from the testimony of his classmates that Isidore Ducasse was particularly exasperated by the pedantry of his *lycée* professors, and the satire in *Maldoror* may well derive from this biographical source. But in the poem pedantry is blown up to something more significant than the pettiness of a provincial classroom; it becomes a pervasive rigidity and clumsiness which obstructs thought and speech. Stylistically it assumes a kind of preciosity or periphrasis; thus a request to kneel becomes: *"Inclinez la binarité de vos rotules vers la terre."* But parallel to this kind of device there is an excess of specificity which also mimics in its way the language of science.

*L'homme . . . vit dans l'eau, comme l'hippocampe; à travers les couches supérieures de l'air, comme l'orfraie; et sous la terre, comme la taupe, le cloporte et la sublimité du vermiceau.*[4]

Here *hippocampe* replaces *poisson* and *orfraie* replaces *oiseau*. These examples may seem mild enough. But they are important to notice because they show how the full-blown surrealism of other images is rooted in a parody of logic, an excess of intellectual rigor—in Lautréamont's phrase, a *"tension d'esprit."* It is the same excess of logic which leads Maldoror to widen his mouth with a knife to force a smile.

4 Man lives in water like the sea-horse; in the upper layers of the atmosphere like the osprey; and under the ground like the mole, the woodlouse and the sublimity of the earthworm.

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The result of the stylistic illogicality is to destroy the metaphor itself. The Romantic irony which questions the seriousness of the whole book, page by page, is turned back on the language to question *it*. If a character is described as beautiful, as *beau,* we are regularly given an imagistic equivalent, *beau comme . . .* Beautiful as what? *". . . beau comme la rencontre fortuite sur une table de dissection d'une machine à coudre et d'un parapluie."* Such an image already points straight to surrealism. The *beau commes* appear more and more frequently toward the end of the book and become ritualistic; they are frequently piled one upon another with a kind of lavish virtuosity. Ultimately they constitute an attempt to realize an absolute ugliness just as Maldoror's aggressions attempt to realize the perfect crime.

The *beau commes* imply, as I have said, the destruction of the metaphor and of all figurative language. It is easy to see why. There is a balance in any metaphor between the logical and illogical, between the properties of tenor and vehicle which coincide and those which do not. In *Maldoror* the non-coincident properties dwindle to near zero. Lautréamont's game is to keep the elements in this second class as tiny as possible without allowing them to disappear. When he succeeds he is very good. But there are many instances in which he chooses to fail, instances where the coincident elements disappear and the non-coincident or illogical elements assume an autonomy which is to all practical purposes absolute. If you ask what these figures are doing in the text, you can only conclude that they constitute a kind of literary criticism, a destructive commentary on the rest of poetry.

But to conclude with this would do injustice to the brilliance of logical compression which the apparent illogic of *Maldoror*'s style occasionally attains. This brilliance merits a last example. Standing by the sea one evening, Maldoror hales a strange creature in the water—half man, half fish. The monster relates to Maldoror the instances of human cruelty which have driven him, a normal human being, to flee society and to live in the sea where his physiological transformation has taken place. Before he begins his recital he pauses an instant to summon his recollections. Lautréamont describes this pause as follows:

*L'amphibie n'osa pas trop s'avancer jusqu'au rivage; mais dès qu'il se fut assuré que sa voix parvenait assez distinctement jusqu'à mon*

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*tympan, il réduisit le mouvement de ses membres palmés, de manière à soutenir son buste, couvert de goëmons, au-dessus des flots mugissants. Je le vis incliner son front, comme pour invoquer, par un ordre solennel, la meute errante des souvenirs. Je n'osais pas l'interrompre dans cette occupation, saintement archéologique: plongé dans le passé, il ressemblait à un écueil.*[5]

What does this last image mean: *"Plongé dans le passé, il ressemblait à un écueil?"* I suppose that first of all it means this: that the intensity of the amphibian's revery upon his past fixes him in the water with the immobility of a reef. Of course the amphibian is plunged physically not in the past but in the sea, and the preceding description of his bust protruding out of the water and hung with sea weed suggests that his resemblance to a reef is even more literal. But in the equivalence between past and sea there is still another suggestion: history is a kind of sea in which the amphibian, having escaped from its restless variety, remains stationary like a reef. On the other hand there may be the contrary sense that his sudden engulfment in the past beats upon him with the violence of waves upon a reef.

What I should like to be evident, in all the preceding discussion of style, is the relevance of Lautréamont's peculiar rhetoric to his morality and comedy. The effect of language which is constantly off balance is to dramatize and to mock a structureless moral world. Ultimately the bewilderment and terror of the world of *Maldoror* render it a kind of hell, and its language can be regarded as a kind of diabolic teasing. As such, Lautréamont's hell must necessarily remain less valuable to us than the hell of his near-contemporary, Rimbaud; in comparison with *Une Saison en Enfer, Maldoror* appears uneven, bookish and self-conscious. But its brilliant and destructive outrage contains nevertheless an equal richness of moral perception, perception which, given Lautréamont's practical jokes with language, remains ticklishly inconclusive, and is all the more relevant for that.

5 The amphibian dared not approach the beach too closely; but as soon as he was assured that his voice carried with sufficient clarity to my ear-drum, he reduced the motion of his webbed hands in such a manner as to maintain his torso, hung with sea-wrack, above the moaning waves. I saw him bow his head as if to invoke by solemn command the wayward pack of memories. I dared not interrupt him in this sacredly archeological occupation: plunged in the past, he resembled a reef.

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# THEATER CHRONICLE

## THE THEATER AND THE ACADEMY

The theater is, in fact, already in our colleges and universities. It has been there, more and more, since G. P. Baker started work forty years ago. Practical work in the theater, along with creative writing, and practical work in music, painting and sculpture, is firmly entrenched in educational institutions *all* over the country. Which means, among other things, that playwrights and directors, like poets and painters and musicians, may be at least partially supported by education. The universities are already among the chief patrons of the living arts in America. I want to speculate here on some of the questions to which this relationship between the theater and the university gives rise.

From the point of view of a college or university which is trying to provide a liberal education, it seems obvious that the theater could be an educational tool of great and unique effectiveness. Liberal educators are supposedly trying to lead the student to the sources of our tradition, and through the study of a limited number of its masterpieces, to show him its fundamental disciplines of the mind and of the spirit. We find it very hard, in practice, to sort out the vast heritage, and to agree on a curriculum of manageable scope. But in almost every list of worthies you will find Sophocles and Shakespeare, Molière and Ibsen, recognized along with Aristotle and Locke, Galileo and Sigmund Freud. We easily assume, with Hamlet, that great drama does mirror human nature; that it presents an abstract and brief chronicle of its times, wherein we may glimpse moral and political culture as it actually availed in human life.

But the classics, even when we can agree on what they are, are likely to seem a bit irrelevant to our sophomores. We face, in every generation, the tough problem of the transmission of culture; and we find that even when masterpieces mean something to the teacher they may say nothing to the student, and that the arts of life and letters, when the clue is lost, may die. It is at this point that the college theater, as distinguished from the mere sedentary reading of drama, may perform a uniquely valuable service. For the purpose of theatrical production is to

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restore the play to its full life, first in the performers, and the imagined scene, and the movement of the play as a whole, and then in the response of the audience. If the production succeeds in this way it means that a classic has actually been taken off the shelf, its perennial life and its contemporary relevance reaffirmed. The college theater could be a practical and experimental part of liberal education, as valuable in its field as the laboratory is in the training of scientists.

If the college theater did nothing but classics it might be labeled antiquarian. I think that would be a mistake, because the new interpretation of a work of art which reaches actual performance is to some degree creative. We do not think of Toscanini as antiquarian when he plays Beethoven, or Olivier as antiquarian when he plays Oedipus. But I believe that the college theater should also do contemporary works, and original plays by students, teachers and other unrecognized playwrights. And that part of the work of the theater is educational also, like creative writing, painting or music. That is because the receiving end of the educational process is in our own life, and art, such as it is. By trying to do something of his own the student begins to see the point of greatness, and to develop the strength to use it for his own nourishment and guidance.

This picture of what the ideal college theater might do for the ideal liberal college, if we had them both, is much too rosy, I know. But before I recognize some of the actual difficulties, I wish to approach the whole matter from another angle: is it good for the art of the theater to take refuge in an academic institution?

Offhand many people would answer *No*: the academic is remote, and artificially protected, while the theater, if it is to be alive, must take its chances in the great cold world. A domesticated theater, obedient to deans, Ph.D. requirements, parents, and trustees, is almost a contradiction in terms. If you want the theater, you know where to find it: on Times Square. Anything which has not won the long gamble of Broadway production and acquired the cachet of the luxury market, is really not theater at all.

The history of the American theater for the last forty years gives some support to this tough-minded position. Art theaters and little theaters come and go, but Broadway, which is the theatrical market, or "show-shop" as it is affectionately called, goes on in the same way year after year: it represents what the late President Harding liked to call "normalcy" in the theater. Should we be well advised, therefore, to accept Broadway as the inevitable, the only possible place in our American society for the theater to call its own?

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I do not think so. I am one of a large number of lovers of the theater who are dissatisfied with Broadway. And the reason that Broadway is unsatisfactory is very simple: it is because it is a market, and not a workshop. Like all markets, it depends upon its sources of supply, but makes no provision for producing anything itself. Macy's markets Mexican blown glass and plastic bathroom fixtures with godlike impartiality, but does not have to care how they are produced. The Theatre Guild—one of the most successful and characteristic firms on Broadway—markets Shaw, Molnar and O'Neill after they have been formed and recognized elsewhere. Since the little-theater movement, which began shortly before World War I, there has been a long and distinguished list of directors, playwrights, designers, actors and patrons of the theater who have tried to buck the Broadway system in order to provide the theater with a workshop—that is, a place: a physical place with some economic support, and (much more important) a place in the public consciousness—in which the art of the theater could be worked at first and sold second.

So many observers have pointed out that Broadway is fed by the off-Broadway workshops (the little theaters and the college theater of this country, and the theaters of Europe), that it is perhaps unnecessary to substantiate the fact in detail. The little-theater movement, which finally ended with the crash of '29, produced O'Neill, Paul Green, Stark Young, Robert Edmund Jones, and many other artists who represent the very best of the American Theater. The socially conscious anti-Broadway Theater of the '30s—notably the Group Theater and the short-lived but enormously significant Federal Theater—gave us Clurman, Strassberg, Clifford Odets, Franchot Tone, the late Jules Garfield, Marc Blitzstein, and many others. And both of these off-Broadway movements fed the show-shops with new ideas and new techniques and styles too numerous to mention. When the off-Broadway theater grows discouraged and fades away, and the theaters of Europe are darkened by war or revolution, Broadway is bare and dry indeed, as anyone will agree who remembers Broadway in the late '30s. Imagine what the present season would be without the group in the Jan Huss auditorium, the Circle in the Square Theater, the Theater de Lys, the Phoenix Theater—and without Gide, Anouilh, and Giraudoux. And I do not even mention the steady stream of recruits and ideas which the show-shops receive from the college and university theaters.

I know that some observers regard this process, whereby Broadway is fed by workshop theaters off Broadway, as right and natural. The late Mrs. E. J. R. Isaacs of *Theatre Arts Monthly* thought so: she thought that the "Tributary Theater"—her name for everything off

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Broadway—justified its existence only as a feeder, and that the artists and the new ideas which emerged in the workshops would continue to grow and develop when Broadway brought them up—that they would reach maturity and fulfillment in the market. And there are many who still agree with Mrs. Isaacs, who think that the off-Broadway theater is all very well until the show-shops buy it up in pieces.

I do not myself believe that Mrs. Isaacs' diagnosis is quite correct. I think that our playwrights, and especially our directors and actors, are likely to enjoy their real growth and development off Broadway; and that when they are obliged to devote their energies to the arts of the merchandizer instead of the art of the theater, they are often somewhat thwarted and bewildered. The same applies to many European artists who try to cope with our entertainment industry. But this, of course, is a matter of judgment. Some artists make enough money so that they are relatively independent of the market and can indulge in the luxury of pursuing their arts. And we do not know whether an Odets or a Robert Edmund Jones would have gone even farther if they had had real theaters to work in: we do not know for sure, because they, like all the others, were compelled, at a certain point, to make their way in the market. We have never had a chance to see what would happen if we had a theater with some stability, and enjoying a public sanction quite unlike that of the market, in which our artists could continue to work beyond their youth and their apprenticeship. I wish we had such a theater. And this brings me back to the possibilities in a theater intelligently patronized by a university.

The off-Broadway theaters which we have had—the little or art theaters culminating in the '20s, and the socially conscious theaters of the '30s—had their own patronage, and their own public sanction, which the mysterious Zeitgeist, the moods of their times, made possible. The little theaters, like Woodrow Wilson's New Freedom, were on the whole the creation of cultivated old-style Americans who knew Europe, and wished to acclimatize the ancient arts of the theater in America. Both patrons and artists thought of their theater as akin to the symphony orchestras and the art museums, which had been established by the same kind of money. Their motive was sound and idealistic, but at this distance it looks a bit innocent and gentlemanly, not to say genteel—like Wilson himself, with his pince-nez and hard collar. They did not know what it would take to relate the art of the theater to the permanent values and problems of our culture, as Molière and Racine did in their time and place—and when the public mood of idealism was replaced by the period of the Big Money, and then the Big Crash, the art theaters seemed utterly irrelevant to the national life. The theaters

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of the '30s were also sustained by a passing mood of idealism, just as in Wilson's time the public was ready to seek some alternative to market values, and the center of power passed from New York back to Washington. But the idealism of the New Deal was mildly revolutionary; it expressed the hopes and energies of less privileged elements in the population; it is typified not by a fine-drawn Presbyterian face trying to invade the world of action, but by a slangy committee chairman in shirt-sleeves, with a volume of Freud and a sheaf of statistics on slum clearance on his desk. That is recent history, and we all remember how this wave of ambitious hope passed also, as Hitler rose in Germany, Stalin's regime revealed itself more clearly, and World War II approached faster and faster. And as the mood of idealism was replaced by one of cynicism, the *raison d'être* and the public sanction of the socially conscious theaters leaked away. Clurman has a moving account of how this sinister process felt to the members of the Group Theater in his fine history of that theater, *The Fervent Years.*

The moral I wish to draw from this bit of history is this: neither of our off-Broadway, or anti-market theater movements succeeded in expressing really fundamental problems or values of our culture. Both were sustained by passing moods, comparatively superficial and momentary public sanctions, which they themselves hardly understood until too late.

And that brings me back once more to the university and to the question I raised earlier: What might the university do for the theater? Briefly, I think the university might become the patron of the theater. I have already paid my respects to the market as the place of the theater in our society. As an alternative we have tried, in the little-theater days, more or less hit or miss private support; but that was neither strong enough nor self-conscious enough to succeed for long. In the '30s the theater was sustained by the government and by a political movement which accomplished much, but is already behind us. The government does not inspire much confidence as the theater's protector—as I feel strongly when Congressmen Javits proposes a plan for federal support of the theater. Among the institutions in this country with enough stability and public recognition to sustain the theater, what is left if we rule out the market and government? Only education, I think. We are bound to have education in some form; the educational establishment in this country is enormous, varied, and (in spite of the weak position of the teaching profession) rich and powerful.

But I do not think of the university as merely providing the theater with a physical plant and some financial support. I think of it as pro-

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viding a sanction for the theater of a more fundamental kind than the market or the government can give. A college or university engaged in liberal education is supposedly trying to sort out the riches of our tradition, to identify, acquire, and transmit the values and the ways of thinking upon which the civilization is based, and so to nourish the arts and sciences of our own time and place. This is a dialectical process which must be renewed in a different way in every generation. And the point is that the theater, at its best, is also engaged in that process. When it is most deeply alive in its own time it is aware not only of immediate issues and passing moods, but of their history and permanent significance. The distinction I am trying to make between the theater at its best, and that which enjoys only a momentary life, is like that between statesmanship and practical politics. The practical politician finds his power by taking advantage of the situations of the moment, just as a hit on Broadway expresses merely the moods and the clichés of a season. A statesman must also have the ear of the public moment by moment, but at the same time he sees farther and moves toward more permanent objectives. And in the same way a theater, if it is to survive long enough to reach maturity, and make some permanent contribution, must have the attention and interest of a public, yet at the same time base its art upon the lasting lore of the tradition, and celebrate, in its own time, some of the perennial issues and mysteries of human life. Thus the aim of a university at its best is closely analogous to that of the theater at *its* best. They would seem to be natural allies. And if the university cannot provide the sanction for a theater of this kind, what institution in our country can?

I began these remarks by pointing out that the theater is, in fact, already in our universities in a way. And I do not want to minimize what has already been accomplished. If you look over a list of plays which have been produced in university and college theaters in this country in the course of a single year, you will I think be greatly impressed. You will find classics of every period and country; contemporary plays from France or Spain or Germany or Italy; new American plays by authors known and unknown. Of course the quality of these productions varies greatly, but in some college theaters the standard is high enough to make much of the so-called professional theater look rather stale. And some college theaters succeed, over the years, in building a local audience outside the college altogether, and so establishing the kind of far-sighted public sanction which I have been trying to describe. And this goes on all over the country. In purely quantitative terms, the university theater is enormous.

The reason that this picture, encouraging, even exciting though

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it is, is unsatisfactory, is that the university theater is still thought of as a technical school, a feeder for the entertainment industry, and not as a theater in its own right, with its own quite different aims and standards. That is why the universities have not yet ventured to set up permanent theater companies. The actors, technicians, young directors and playwrights, are all students who must get out as soon as they attain a little skill. And for that reason the university theater does not really offer a career in the theater in the same way in which the university laboratories offer careers in Biology or Physics. The laboratories are built on a system of apprenticeship, with workers at every level of development, from rank beginners up to the masters and creative leaders of science. The university theater consists of a very small paid staff responsible mainly for teaching elementary techniques, and a vast number of beginners who must leave as soon as they cease to be beginners. I see no theoretical reason why a theater should not be related to the strictly pedagogical job of a university according to the apprentice system, just as science is—with research, or creative work at the top of the hierarchy, and elementary technical training at the bottom.

There is no a priori theoretical reason why this should not work, but there are lots of practical reasons; and that brings me to the realistic part of my discussion. I have been talking about the ideal university and the ideal theater, each fully conscious of its aims and of the analogies between them. But we all know how, in fact, both the university and the university theater get demoralized, and lose the sense of what they are trying to do. The universities are under the tremendous pressure of applied science, which supplies both industry and war with their power, and offers the younger generation immediate money and status. Under this pressure the whole notion of liberal education looks empty and deluded—including that important part which we call "pure" as distinguished from applied science. Disinterested researchers in Biology or Physics make the same complaints as philosophers or men of letters: the universities tend to turn into technical schools. In our bad moments we think Spengler may have been right: nothing can flourish in our time but engineering. The university theater is, besides, under the pressure of the market and its all-pervasive influence. It is very difficult for a university theater to disregard this pressure, and venture upon something of its own. It is far easier for it to warm over last year's Broadway hits—to resell the nationally advertised, packaged product. When a university theater loses its vitality it is because some hard-pressed director has shrugged his shoulders, and decided to exchange the terrible labor and risk of original work for the easy cachet of Broadway's reflected prestige. And of course when this happens the

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sources which feed Broadway are sources no longer—the stale waters back up, and the theater enters a period of boredom and normalcy.

I have only one further point to make: that no individual and no single institution, not even perhaps a great university, can do much about the relation between the university and the theater single-handed. If a fully mature university theater appears it will be the outgrowth of mysterious forces inside and outside the university. It will have to take advantage—more wisely than its predecessors—of some shift in the public mood and interest. Since World War II, adult education has been booming. The narrow creeds of Marxism are no longer fashionable. Classical music sells on records and the radio; the drugstores stock Lucretius and Alfred North Whitehead in cheap paper editions, along with toothpaste and Mickey Spillane. A new generation of very talented young artists is trying once more to establish little theaters off Broadway. Are these signs of an important New Deal, or new chance, in the theater? If so, will some institution with the requisite power—some great university that is more than a technical school—have the vision to take advantage of them? I do not know, but we may cautiously hope for the best.

**Francis Fergusson**

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Elizabeth Hardwick

# RIESMAN CONSIDERED

David Riesman's collection of essays, *Individualism Reconsidered*,[1] establishes this writer as a novel fact, a kind of invention whose value may be uncertain but whose conspicuous existence has to be faced. Riesman has come upon the scene like the bubble house, television, cinemascope; that is to say he has been a possibility for some years but was not actually on the market until fairly recently. Expected, needed, he stepped forth all smiles to meet the call. His role is difficult to name—is he a teacher, psychologist, sociologist, historian, philosopher? But that does not mean it is easy to escape his notions and effect. A traveler returned from afar might well, for a quick readjustment to the local intellectual life, read *The Lonely Crowd* in a hurry and set aside the latest works of literature for his leisure.

Moderate, energetic, Riesman's originality is to have chosen the utter present. His sheer contemporaneity, his briskly marching in the forward ranks—by comparison with this, many a younger man appears a bit sallow and run-down by the world of comics, television, pop tunes, "crazy" teen-agers, all the raw diet Riesman thrives upon. His fate is this present postwar decade of prosperity; the two suit each other; the man, we feel, has been waiting around for the time. There is often here too the atmosphere of a new administration after twenty years of reform, lamentation and national doubt.

But struck as one is by the timeliness of Riesman's references, there is also a perplexing sadness about him. He is a cheerfully curious and lively observer, as free of "liberal piety" as one of the teen-agers he is so much interested in; yet he has his secret sharer, a tortured image hidden below the deck, the outcast (or rather the *outmoded* in Riesman's case) whose claims make even this bustling man uncomfortably itchy. Riesman is, for that reason, a somewhat nervous and uncertain thinker. There is a great deal in his works of "however" and "nevertheless" and "on the other hand it must be remembered"—expressions of

1 *Individualism Reconsidered*. The Free Press. $6.00

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honorable uneasiness, a generous measure of propitiation. Invariably after an exhortation in one direction, we are reminded of the great value mankind has found in taking the opposite path. Trailing this mind so soundly opinionated and expressive on the whole, you wonder about those vigilant glances into the enemy corner, that tense alertness which wants to startle and pacify at the same time. Perhaps the trouble is that Riesman is going with too young a crowd; he is forty-five and never likely to be whole-heartedly happy in the company of youth and confidence, even though this youthful, consuming, money-free time we live in is his interesting destiny.

In addition to the chronological displacement which makes Riesman's thought sometimes puzzling, he is confusing because of his quite singular need to be effective in the most simple meaning of the term. He likes to select his "truth" according to the occasion, obeying in this odd way the law of supply and demand. Like a therapist whose duty is to persuade and guide, now he tries this line and then another, following the patient's moods. "But it is not enough to know the audience; one must also know *their* context. They may be so buffeted by their adversaries that they need, at least temporarily, to have their prejudices confirmed rather than shaken. For instance, girl students at some of our liberal universities need occasionally to be told that they are not utterly damned if they discover within themselves anti-Negro or anti-Semitic reactions—else they may expiate their guilt by trying to solve the race question in marriage." Riesman's desire to lead back to the barn that rare, mulish girl bent upon a *mésalliance* seems a little over-anxious. What parents, friends, relatives, society, expediency insist upon in such urgent terms need not be taken upon himself by a busy sociologist.

"What may on the surface appear to me as my courageous choice of an unorthodox and unpopular position may turn out on closer examination to be a form of exhibitionism. Or I may be more conciliatory than is warranted because I want to be liked." It is hard to know how to judge a thinker whose intellectual positions are so profoundly modified by "psychology," who treats his own opinions as if they were those of a character in a novel he was writing. Or again, standing in the center of the stage, watching the audience assemble, he waits for the feel of the thing and then chooses his rubbery mask, comic one way, tragic upside down. Solid success, effective therapy, animated delivery—all of this is achieved, but frequently at the expense of some of the brilliance that undoubtedly might be there otherwise. Riesman has genuine vitality and, of course, remarkable gifts. But if you make yourself honey the flies will eat you.

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Inner-direction and other-direction: these categories made popular by Riesman's writing correspond very neatly to the character structures described by Erich Fromm. Other-direction is held to be typical of our present age; this phenomenon is very much the same as Fromm's "marketing orientation." In Riesman's work the inner-directed society "develops in its typical members a social character whose conformity is insured by their tendency to acquire early in life an internalized set of goals." The person usual in such a society has "certain general aims and drives—the drive to work hard, save money, or to strive for rectitude or for fame . . . as against the other-directed person who grows up in a much more amorphous social system, where alternate destinations cannot be clearly chosen at an early age."

The other-directed person shows "a tendency to be sensitized to the expectations and preferences of others." A detail of his psychic existence: "The feeling of powerlessness of the other-directed character is, then, the result in part of the lack of genuine commitment to work. . . . From this it follows that the other-directed person is not able to judge the work of others. . . ." Neither the other-directed nor the inner-directed designation is meant to be a value judgment in the strictest sense; however, Riesman does introduce a desirable direction, the "autonomous" person (Fromm's "productive" person). This person has the courage and strength to act out his destiny and character with responsibility and confidence. No one will be found to dispute the excellence of such citizens.

In describing his various character structures Riesman is extraordinarily imaginative and even amusing. His "other-directed" products of progressive education, restless, homeless, precariously in the know, are like those bug-eyed dreams pouring out of a space ship. These "others" come equipped with "radar" which tells them what the gang is thinking; the "inners" have a "gyroscope" to keep them on the path of duty. The others zoom about in an abundance economy with a declining population; the inners battled with scarcity. Others have a diffused anxiety; inners suffer from guilt and shame when they fall below their own standards. The inners expect to have to master their environment; the others are concerned with mastering and presenting themselves as a commodity, competing with other personalities. And so it goes, rather like those old tests in psychology class in which the spirit was unmasked in the squeezing of a tube of tooth paste.

Just what contribution this sort of inquiry makes one cannot be sure. There is reason to suspect readers enjoy this display of "types" as they would a new pastime. One can combine new classifications with

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old ones by other investigators and create a fascinating game of Who Am I? (Answer: an other-directed mesomorph.) The trouble is, of course, that in the final summation the type-maker is always obliged to admit that most people are a combination of types and so the fun is somewhat reduced by yet another admission that even a single human being can hardly ever be clearly placed. Riesman has his "varieties" of inner- and other-direction and Fromm his "blends."

Historically, it may be true that other-direction is more typical of the present time than of the past. However, it is certainly not new, as the literature of the past shows. For every person with inherited ideals and driving will there was another, fluid, adaptable, painfully attuned to others, terrified that the cut of his waistcoat would not be quite the thing worn by fashionable young men in London, fearful of exhibiting a failure of "inside dopesterism." Among contemporary Americans it is true that many are "tense and anxious lest their radar not bring them the latest bulletins," but there is still quite a lot of secret inner-direction. Many a Madison Avenue advertising executive has worked, struggled and endured, his rise upward as bitter, silent and sternly pursued as that of an old robber baron.

*The Lonely Crowd* is the most popular and readable of Riesman's works. Its success rests upon a solid basis of cleverness, up-to-dateness, knowingness and humor. Riesman writes about the shift from "bringing up children to bringing up father." He knows the supermarket, *The Joy of Cooking,* the "sincerity" of Frank Sinatra's style, a magazine called *Hot Rod.* He flatters and consoles us by sharing our own secret acquaintance with the "media" and even encourages one in the investigation of these pleasures, going so far as to state that those parents who are frightened of TV and the comics are really jealous of their children's expert knowledge of them. (This amazing notion is something like saying a fat man despairs of ever understanding a child's love for a candy bar.) Just as Riesman forgives one for his innocent vices, he at the same time admits one into a more exclusive realm by using as examples "The Other Margaret" by Lionel Trilling, articles by Mary McCarthy, along with the classical works of sociology and economics.

There are times when Riesman's style in *The Lonely Crowd* is a bit *too* worldly, reminding one suddenly of the gags of radio comics. An example of this is the phrase "chimney-corner media" as a description of folk-tale entertainments of "tradition-directed" societies. But on the whole *The Lonely Crowd* is his best book and better in the short than in the longer version because of this writer's tendency to repetition.

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*Faces in the Crowd* is a long, rather dull series of "portraits," meant to give concrete examples of Riesman's character types. This work is a "project"—expensive, pretentious, dubious. Questionnaires, interviews, interpretations, all of this decoration in the end succeeds in giving us merely a superficial psychoanalytical report on some elected persons. (The only genuine reward of these heavy pages is a fantast named Henry Friend. Friend is fifteen years old, goes to a progressive school in Los Angeles, is being analyzed by a Reichian and at the time of the interview was the founder of his local Young Citizens for Wallace Club.) The interpretations are offered with quite a bit of authority and relish, but nevertheless the dangers of triviality and pointlessness loom up on every page. For instance, there is the following comment upon a young "subject" who greatly admires the work of Thomas Mann: "I am struck, moreover, by a certain surprising provinciality in the judgments themselves; Mann has little standing with the avant-garde, German or American, but only with middlebrows." This shows what a din of static comes to one who listens with too eager an ear to the buzz of some imaginary goddess of Fashion.

It seems likely that Riesman's projects and interpretations are much more vivid than those one may expect from other sociologists. Indeed the mind sinks into despair at the thought of the other projects mentioned in this book: the Cornell group trying to define persons who possess "social creativity"; a Brooklyn College group interviewing "self-actualizing" individuals. These scholars, defiantly gay and busy, are mad lovers of the moon—moonstruck, they follow the course of a smile, trace the path of a sigh.

Freud and Veblen: Riesman is uncomfortably challenged by these figures. Great they are, strange and wonderful, and yet a little unreal somehow, a bit *impossible* with so much "askew" in their "character structures," with their sudden explosions of mischief and selfishness. Cocky, intransigent, insistent, they threaten the young with their resistance to compromise, their unsuitability, like that of a brilliant but unstable suitor one must reject for our present-day America, a land dizzy with jobs and goods and "mobile" personalities, heroically consuming on the world's material and spiritual market.

The general impression one gets from Riesman's book on Veblen is that Veblen was tiresomely simple. A brilliant goof, he didn't care about clothes and wanted to prevent other people from enjoying them; he built himself a log cabin in the woods; he was "provincial," not sure of himself and therefore filled with the need to exaggerate and insist

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upon his difference. ". . . When we think how much suffering he underwent and caused, we cannot unequivocally condemn the propaganda of adjustment to which contemporary eccentrics are exposed." The disenchantment of Veblen and that of Mark Twain is somehow not of the first order; these Middle Westerners are not secure enough socially to afford the "ennui-pessimism of the Eastern patricians," such as Henry and Brooks Adams. In Veblen's character we are told there is a great deal of the "saboteur"—he is always sneaking about, slyly refusing to co-operate. "His strategies of non-compliance are in this interpretation only the end product, codified by recognition, of a repressed inner urge to show off." And "more important was Veblen's fear of eminence, of the dark unnameable dangers attendant upon putting oneself forward, out in the open, an object of critical notice, a target before spectators." But this is fantastic—Veblen *was* great and many a man ready to stand up and be counted among the eminent is not.

Riesman suggests that the desire to provoke envy, the psychological basis of Veblen's "conspicuous consumption," has in prosperous America been replaced by the *fear* of being envied. This notion is impossible to credit; the fear of being envied is an eccentricity, just as outrageous to the majority as it has always been. The desire to repudiate their privileges does exist for certain people and is nothing new. The princess and the footman is not so different from the "liberal girl" in her occasional excursions into the lower orders. One of the pleasant rights of those on top is to sink, whereas the lowly have only the possibility of trying laboriously to move upward.

The essays on Freud in *Individualism Reconsidered* are very striking and often more than a little puzzling. Freud is immense, yes, but is this striving, gloomy thinker "right" for us, for America? Riesman, smiling loftily at "pessimism" as if it were an old contraption now replaced by a new manufacture, often finds our American experience to be mysteriously different from the generally human one. Freud could not foresee what would happen to our economy and so he is a bit out of date, an attitude which reminds one of other critics' frantic assertion that Freud could not say much to us because his clinical knowledge came largely from wealthy Viennese Jews. The struggle for life, the brutal need to make one's bread and one's fate in a competitive society were taken for granted by Freud. Bitterly enduring and striving he did not foresee an America in which hunger is confined to people on a reducing diet. Riesman says about Freud, "Certainly, his utilitarian and Philistine attitudes toward work and play were both central to his own view of life and a dominant note in his cultural environment. But

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what really matters to us is that by virtue of his greatness—by virtue, too, of the fact that he was on the whole a liberator of men—Freud has succeeded in imposing on a later generation a mortgage of reactionary and constricting ideas that were by no means universally held even in his own epoch." (The difficulty of extracting the meat from claws like that is one of the experiences of Riesman's writing on Freud.) Freud came from a job-minded society. His ideas "circulate today in an American society that has much more chance to be leisure-minded and play-minded." Let us hope Riesman has not mistaken a footnote for the main text, since any important economic constriction would seriously confound nearly all of his impressions.

In another instance Riesman professes himself amazed at Freud's desire to get on in the world. "While he was apt to minimize the extent of his own ambition, it did not trouble him to avow his wish to be a full professor, to be famous, to be an 'authority' . . . ." Freud also was rather embarrassing, in this view, in his gratitude for worldly honors, for the invitation to speak at Clark University, in speaking of the Goethe Prize given to him by the City of Frankfort as "the climax of my life." Psychoanalyzing these sentiments, Riesman says, "here again one is confronted with the problem of Freud's ambivalence toward authority. . . . In spite of himself, Freud could not help his preoccupation with questions of rank within the institutions of solid-seeming Vienna and, beyond Vienna, solid-seeming 'official' German science and chauvinistically hostile but culturally reputed Parisian science." No matter what Freud "could not help," Riesman's grandeur dazzles us in this instance.

Other interesting notions on Freud: "Freud's work, as I read his own account of it, seems to me of the very greatest intellectual interest; beside such detective work, even that of Sherlock Holmes is pallid and limited." This bizarre comparison is one a man might ponder for a day without learning how it was arrived at or what the "even" means; a mysterious image, like something one has in his mind at the end of a troubled dream. Still this is not nearly so original as Riesman's idea that Freud "patronizes" childhood; this conclusion is drawn from the fact that Freud thought children did not want to grow up and had to be forced to do so by parents and society, by pain and disappointment.

Both Veblen and Freud are scolded by this author because of their lack of "sophistication." Sophistication stands enthroned in Riesman's mind, that indefinable something—nature's noblemen like Freud and Veblen may have their genius but this appealing quality is not theirs.

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Veblen's queerness is something of a pose, a temper tantrum, the clever peasant's way of clogging up the works; Freud's gloom is cold mutton from old Vienna. But in the end it is all well. After his lengthy animadversions, Riesman redeems his men with a flourish. "In fact, it is just Veblen's irreverence which we stand in need of in a day when total commitment is being asked of everyone." And Freud: "Having made these criticisms of Freud's view of religion, I think we must grant his tremendous contribution to our understanding of it." The ship rocks, one is vaguely distressed, but the forward course is maintained.

*Individualism Reconsidered* is certainly an impressive volume, thirty essays, many of considerable length and dealing with a large number of subjects. Still, the work is very often of that peculiar glassy brightness which leaves one in a mood of discomfort. There are many awkwardly written passages, reminding one all too readily of sociology books: "Athletic prowess may be declining as an unequivocal assurance of status, and certainly no other prowess can substitute for interpersonal competence as a guarantor of social success." High culture is sometimes recommended in jazzy tones, like an effective singing commercial. Those who read books are called "hard-cover men" and are to be distinguished from their soft, light-reading brothers. "Yet it is precisely on the good-sized, hard-cover book that the bookworm is nourished. He cannot bury himself in a moving image. . . . He is a creature who needs wide margins. For he tries to create amid all the pressures of contemporary culture a kind of 'social space' around himself, an area of privacy. He does this by tieing himself in his thinking and feeling to sources of some relative permanence—hence impersonal—while remaining somewhat impermeable to the fluctuating tastes, panics, and most menacing of all, the appeals to be 'adjusted' from his contemporaries."

From such thoughts and from the title of the book, one is urged to conclude that Riesman is on the side of "individualism." And yet it is a "variety" of individualism and not the pure thing we are used to. Its most personal note is not the appeal for culture or "autonomy" but that part of Riesman which most yearns for complete acceptance of our world, for a good opinion of ourselves, an admission of well-being. This is reasonable therapy, but it may not pass as history or philosophy.

Muckrakers, reformers, expatriates, pessimists, sectarians—Riesman dreads these as a star dreads a meeting with a has-been. This writer is not so much a conservative as an optimist: he wants to enjoy the

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present, he looks for the violet between the rocks. Sometimes his optimism mounts up to a harmless but unnerving mania, as in the comparison of the move to the suburbs with the exploration and settlement of the frontier. "But frontier towns are not usually very attractive. And frontier behavior is awkward: people have not yet learned to behave comfortably in the new surroundings." The pioneer woman is recognized by the touch of oregano she puts in the casserole. "Among men particularly, the demand that one must enjoy food, and not simply stow it away, is relatively new, and again these pioneers are awkwardly self-conscious."

These cool-eyed scouts tracking the forests of Suburbia, moving on to new "frontiers of consumption" are no doubt singing to the accompaniment of an electric guitar during the long, lonesome evenings.

"Some Observations on Intellectual Freedom," which Riesman published in 1953, is his most extravagant and lover-like address to our present situation. (True, there is an enormous eye winking over the reader's head. In a later postcript Riesman more or less repudiates the main text.) Answering an article in which Archibald MacLeish expressed certain fears for the freedom of the intellectual in America, Riesman takes a passionate stand against such unhealthy imaginings. ". . . The naming of evils, intended as a magical warding-off, can have the opposite effect." By taking a positive attitude, looking for the best, Riesman hopes to comfort and reshape the diseased extremity like a corrective shoe. MacLeish was disturbed by a growing disrespect for the intellectual, but Riesman thinks: "In a way, the attention that the intellectuals are getting these days, though much of it is venomous and indecent, testifies to the great improvement in our status over that of an earlier day. What might not Henry Adams have given for such signs of recognition!"

There is some of the cheerful impudence here of a press agent who thinks his client's arrest is better than nothing. . . . That were some love, but little policy.

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# BOOKS

## TIME FROZEN

A FABLE. By William Faulkner. Random House. $4.75.

Mr. William Faulkner has been working on this novel—if that is what it is—for the last nine years and it is, appropriately, a work of ambitious theme and dimension. It has the diffused moral glow of affirmation that writers of talent seem bound to hanker after sooner or later. In nearly all his novels he has been the regionalist and one of those who lay down the foundations of a culture. He has been called, in this respect, bardic, a worker in legend and saga and although he has been a good deal compared with Hawthorne in American literature, he will suggest to an English critic an even greater resemblance to Scott. But there has always been an alien irritant in his talent: the contact with Europe through the Europeanized Eliot and through Joyce in literature, and through the First World War in life. The last has occasionally been explicit, as in *Soldiers Pay* or in one or two short stories—"Turn About" is one of the best stories he has ever written. Europe is explicit also in *A Fable*.

Mr. Faulkner has always turned his subjects into history: that is to say the story has stopped, Fate has had its say, the thing is settled before it begins; we go back over it as it rots down in the compost of time. Mr. Faulkner has no sense of what things may become, instead he has the myth-maker's sense of the different ways in which experience is repetitive and over. In *A Fable* he moves from the native past of Yoknapatawpha to history on a larger scale. He goes to the Europe of 1916 which, as we know, so profoundly affected the writers of his generation. Old Kaspar sits in the sun and tells us he does not know what the war was about except that, in the end, people began to feel it must be the last war of all. Mr. Faulkner has always loved the land; he has always hated mechanical civilization and the castrated man it is thought to produce; but like Crane and Hemingway before him he is romantically curious about military *virtu* and ritual. The clash of rifle butts as the guard changes, the sounding of the *Last Post,* the pulling down of the flag, the self-mutilations of hierarchy and command, the privileged speeding of cars to headquarters, and so on, have an almost religious connotation for him and are certainly marked by rhetoric and nostalgia. Mr. Faulkner is far from the same sort of

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thing in Vigny's *Servitude et Grandeur Militaires;* he is close to the romanticism of Crane and strikes the European as very American of its period. He describes an initiation. And there is another point to note when we consider where Mr. Faulkner's historical compulsion has taken him in this book. It is this. The tragedy of the First World War lay in the conjunction of mass slaughter with the feeling of meaninglessness. The war was felt to be an outrage committed inexplicably against each human person. This could not be said or felt of the Second World War and it cannot be said of the warlike state of the world today, for our wars are revolutionary and revolutions have meaning. They are also fought by technicians and technicians are notoriously absorbed in their work and are morally segregated and sustained by it. They may become traitors; they will never mutiny—and mutiny is Mr. Faulkner's subject. The truly symbolical figure of our time is the traitor or divided man, not the mutineer; it is Judas not Christ. *A Fable* is a fantasy natural to a past dispensation. The novel ends, with unconscious literary 'placing' in the now barren ceremony at the Arc de Triomphe before the tomb of the unknown soldier. One might say that the 1914 war was the final gift of European culture to America.

It is rarely easy to disentangle the narrative of Mr. Faulkner's novels. We can simplify it however. When the book opens we are in the penultimate phase of the 1914 war. Hardly any Americans have arrived. There is a mutiny in the French army. It is a protest on the part of the ordinary human being against the terror and misery of the trenches. Why not make a simple act of will and just refuse to go on? The mutiny is seen as a rumor, a mystery which has, as it turns out, been fomented by a corporal from the Middle East who has acquired French nationality and who has twelve secretive assistants, one of whom eventually betrays him. The story opens wonderfully with the arrival of the arrested men at Headquarters. Presently the disgraced general in command hands over his sword and the disaffected regiment is unloaded into a prison camp. They will be shot. The population is divided between its own desire for peace and its anger at the rebellion. In the meantime there is a false armistice and the Germans have been contacted. Another regiment (I believe I am right in saying: one can never be sure of one's facts after reading Mr. Faulkner), setting out to emulate the doctrine of non-resistance, is shot up by its own guns. Mr. Faulkner's business is to take the situation at all levels, though not in the rule of thumb manner of realism, and to explore the conflict between the moral claims of war as an exorable but pitying institution and the anguish of man, to put man's need of hierarchy against the

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heart, to set Saint Paul against Christ. The crisis of the allegory lies in the interviews of the Supreme Commander with some of the prisoners, but above all with the leader. The analogy with Christian myth is covertly insinuated: the leader is in fact the bastard son of the once dissolute and immensely wise Supreme Commander, who is admirably drawn; he tempts the son with freedom, with the arguments of Saint Paul, but finding him obdurate, leaves him to be shot. By an odd chance he falls dead, with two others, still tied to the post of the execution yard and with a crown of barbed wire on his head. It is a crucifixion. By accident or design he is identified with the unknown soldier, a symbol of the will of man in his solitude to prevail.

Such a simplification of the theme is necessary but intolerable. Mr. Faulkner may be playing rhetorical poker with the marked cards of myth and symbol, but he is not a purveyor of melodrama. He is enriched by his vices and his idiosyncrasies as a novelist. There is the characteristic digression into the garrulous story of the stolen racehorse which can win races on three legs. There is the tale of the horse's foul-mouthed and crooked English groom, who is later seen getting the soldiers to gamble with him on their expectation of death, at a shilling a day. There is the absurd figure of the exalted Negro preacher. There are the women. These are entangled in the allegory and, with Mr. Faulkner, that means their declamatory unconscious is entangled and their pungent physical presence. The prose is written as incantation, in swelling and diminishing monologue; it is filled with purple patches, conceits, epigrams, and lapidary phrases, and those images that paralyze movement, but intensify the moment. For Mr. Faulkner's aim, as an historian, is to isolate and freeze each moment of the past:

And that was all. Then it was sunset. As they stood in the turning flood of night, the ebb of day rang abruptly with an orderly discordant diapason of bugles, orderly because they all sounded at once, discordant because they sounded not one call, but three; the *Battre aux Champs* of the French, the *Last Post* of the English, the *Retreat* of the Americans, beginning inside the city and spreading from cantonment and depot to cantonment and depot, rising and falling within its own measured bruit as the bronze throat of orderly and regulated War proclaimed and affirmed to the end of day, clarion and sombre above the parade rite of *Mount* and *Stand Down* as the old guards, custodians of today, relinquished to tomorrow's, the six sergeants themselves appearing this time, each with his old guard or his new, the six files in ordered tramp and wheel facing each its rigid counterpart juxtaposed, the barked commands in the three different tongues ringing in the same discordant unison as the bugles, in staccato *poste* and *riposte* as the guards exchanged and the three sentries of the new ones assumed the

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posts. Then the sunset gun went from the old citadel, deliberate and profound, as if a single muffled drumstick had been dropped once against the inverted bowl of hollow and resonant air, the sound fading slowly and deliberately until at last, with no suture to mark its close, it was lost in the murmur of bunting with which the flags, bright blooms of glory myriad across the embattled continent, sank, windless again, down.

or to give each moment of time or experience its final own fatal judgment or epithet. The only criticism we make is the old one: that all Mr. Faulkner's moments have the same intensity.

The whole conception is poetic. We shall read of "day dream's idle unexpectation." Or

One more day I would have missed him which should have told me, warned me that what faced us was doom, not destiny, since only destiny is clumsy, inefficient, procrastinative, while doom never is.

But behind the rhetorician and the dizzy dialectician who is metaphysically wonderstruck at the way one idea, or even one word, turns into its opposite, there is another Faulkner. This is the sardonic, the 'jedgmatic,' the garrulous folk writer, as incurably repetitive and parenthetical as the folk. He drawls out his portraits of the soldiers, his life story of the blasphemous English groom; he drawls out the night talk in the trenches, the professional talk of the aerodrome; the nasty talk of the assassins or the burial squad and what they will do for one, or preferably, two bottles of brandy. The native Faulkner is the old pungent Faulkner and, in trying to pick his way through this consciousness and that, the reader is grateful for this survival. For what one notices is that there is no equivalent to Pop-Eye in this book. The precise, brutal, bleeding savage pity we recall in *Soldiers Pay* is missing—except in the murder or execution of the French Commander in the end—and this from a theme which would seem to demand all Mr. Faulkner's capacity for horror. Instead, evil is generalized by words like "anguish" and so on. The war is an atmosphere, a dark if peopled eloquence; an atmosphere that pervades like the smell of refuse and rules by some implicit yet mysterious moral and physical force of its own. There is no doubt that Mr. Faulkner's supreme gift is the creation of atmospheres of one kind or another; but we are now dealing with a writer who has moved from destructive despair, in his own work, to conscious affirmation: to that extent his world becomes more recognizable than the earlier one of idiots, sadists and derelicts, because it is more comprehensive and humane; but it is recognizable solely on the sympathetic, engaging and immensely ingenious level of

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allegory. The moral Faulkner of *A Fable* represents the sort of accomplished retreat one notices, say, in Tolstoy's *Resurrection*.

In the novels of his generation, like *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*, which have influenced Faulkner (novels which had worked back through the chaos of the mind's associations toward archetypal myth), the human representative figures like Mr. and Mrs. Bloom for example, have been more powerful than their myth. Mr. Faulkner's are weaker. But his richness of texture is still there and, above all, there is that capacity for passion which—combining, as it does, with literary artificialities—gives him his intensity, his thwarted power and his integrity as an artist. I am not one to defend a novelist for being exasperating to read, or for being difficult; no amount of intellectual sophistry can make the unreadable readable and, after all, we have learned to do our best by the 'difficult' writers of the last thirty years. Some private worlds are nuts that cannot be cracked except by one university on behalf of another and not on behalf of readers. But if the difficulty of Faulkner is partly the result of too much reading in an isolated society, it springs from a genuine judgment on our time. He has been a writer divided between idiosyncrasies of regional genius and a nostalgia for a contemporary means of dealing with a universal subject. The division is still apparent in the rather laden majesty of this allegory where a universal subject has been treated as the compendium of a word-drunk mind.

**V. S. Pritchett**

## HOMER AND HELLENISM

THE HOMERIC GODS: THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF GREEK RELIGION. By Walter F. Otto. Translated by Moses Hadas. Pantheon. $5.00.

Although it is addressed to the general reader and all the impedimenta of scholarship are refreshingly absent, Walter Otto's study of the Olympian religion (first published in Germany twenty-five years ago) displays a profound insight into the spirit of Greek civilization. This is probably the best introduction to the study of Hellenism available in English. Primarily an interpretation of the Homeric view of life, with little reference to the historical background of Achaean society, it shows how the intellectual and aesthetic achievements of Greek civilization developed out of the conception of the gods conveyed in the Homeric poems. Unlike virtually all English-speaking and most

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German scholars, Otto does not judge the Homeric gods by the standards of Platonic and Christian moralism and is thereby able to regard them not merely as characters in a series of bedroom comedies but as the expressions of a genuine religious faith. Both in his understanding of Hellenism and in the grace and sustained eloquence of his style he is a true disciple of Nietzsche.

The most significant quality of early Greek religion was its acceptance of nature. "There has never been a religion in which the miraculous, in the literal sense of transcending the natural order, has played so slight a role." In view of the constant interference of the Homeric gods in mortal affairs, such an assertion may, at first sight, seem paradoxical; but as Otto shows by a detailed analysis, the gods are represented not as changing the natural course of events but as participating in it. The stories of the death of Hector and the homecoming of Odysseus in no way depend on supernatural machinery and could have been told without any reference to the gods. For the Greeks, "the divine is not superimposed as a sovereign power over natural events; it is revealed in the forms of the natural, as their very essence and being." "If we look more closely at the occasions when these divine interventions take place, we find that they always come at the critical moment when human powers suddenly converge, as if charged by electric current, on some insight, some resolution, some deed. These decisive turns which, as every attentive observer knows, are regularly experienced in an active life, the Greeks regarded as manifestations of the gods." "For other peoples miracles take place; but a greater miracle takes place in the spirit of the Greek, for he is capable of so regarding the aspects of daily experience that they can display the awesome lineaments of the divine without losing a whit of their natural reality." This recognition of reality pervades the whole Homeric epos, which presents life in essentially tragic terms and offers no irrational consolation. Although wickedness and hybris are likely to end in catastrophe, man's fate is not, in general, determined by any rules of justice or morality or by any cosmic purpose; it is only the strong and the prudent who can count on divine aid; and death, which is the negation of all the natural vitality represented by the gods, is an unmitigated evil.

It was Homer's tragic vision that sustained Greek society through its most creative period, and one cannot appreciate its achievement unless one understands why he was regarded as a great religious teacher. Not until the decadence produced by the catastrophe of the Peloponnesian War did philosophers begin to demand more consoling and less

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realistic beliefs. Plato insisted on reading an ethical meaning into cosmic processes and was thereby led to preach sublimation of man's natural vitality and to condemn the Olympians as immoral. Divinity, which the early Greeks had apprehended under many different names in all forms of heightened experience, could be found only through a mystical withdrawal from nature. Platonic monism was a denial of the whole genius of Greek civilization, as was also the totalitarian society envisaged in *The Republic* and *The Laws;* yet Western scholarship, especially in Great Britain and the United States, has generally approached Hellenism by way of Plato and has accepted his dismissal of the Homeric religion as a mark of moral and intellectual enlightenment. After the Greeks had become sophisticated, they could, of course, no longer believe in the physical reality of Apollo and Athene and Aphrodite; but though the Olympians were merely symbols, they represented genuine aspects of human experience. To believe that in moments of intellectual insight or sexual emotion the human personality was irradiated with influences from another dimension of being was certainly less stultifying, both morally and intellectually, than to believe, with Plato, that all material things were merely shadows of divine ideas, or, with Judaeo-Christian theologians, that the world was governed by an omnipotent deity who could be trusted to punish the wicked and come to the aid of the meek and the oppressed.[1]

The spirit of Western civilization has always been predominantly Platonic and Hebraic, and it would, of course, be futile to deplore it. But as we move toward barbarism and catastrophe while the disciples of Plato and the prophets continue to deceive us with impossible utopias, a study of Hellenism can do something to restore our respect for human nature. At least once in human history there was a society which could accept all forms of natural experience without, on the one hand, reading some moral or historic purpose into the course of events or, on the other hand, denying the objective validity of man's aesthetic and spiritual insights.

**Henry Bamford Parkes**

1 Aristotle, another product of the decadence, has been almost as serious an obstacle as Plato to the understanding of Hellenism. How many generations of critics have been led astray, for example, by his statement that the tragic hero comes to grief because of some *hamartia* (flaw or error)! This essentially Philistine conception, which implies that suffering is a punishment for sin, does not apply to a single Greek tragedy, not even those of Sophocles. Oedipus and Antigone do not suffer because of any flaw or error but because life is like that.

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## CREEPING NIHILISM

NATURAL RIGHT AND HISTORY. By Leo Strauss. University of Chicago Press. $5.00.

The interest in the problems of natural right or natural law has increased remarkably in this century. This trend has been observed in Europe since the first World War, and now it is to be observed in this country. The causes, however, differ. Perhaps the most important is the perception that a positivistic theory of law cannot adequately defend us against the unlimited power of the totalitarian state. But no less obvious is the motive of wishing to restrict the freedom of the individual in favor of a more "organic" or "natural" structure of society. The intellectual level of the new books on these problems varies considerably. For the most part they lack the conceptual clarity requisite to handling questions so intricate and emotionally charged. It is the merit of Leo Strauss's work that it is written with a lucidity that makes it easier to show wherein its main fallacies lie.

Strauss deplores the breakdown of the classical tradition of natural right, which was affected, chiefly, by three developments of modern thought: non-teleological natural science, the position that has become known as Historicism, and the distinction between facts and values. He restricts his criticism to the latter two, leaving aside the first and perhaps the most important one. Historicism—a term peculiar to German thinking—means that the recognition of historical changes in human beliefs and convictions destroys the idea of an eternally valid "Truth." Strauss attempts to demonstrate that Historicism is self-contradictory: if "all human thoughts or beliefs are historical," then Historicism itself is historical. This argument is based on the ambiguity of the word "thought." It is a word which, like the German *Geist,* embraces the most dissimilar kinds of mental activity, logic and mathematics as well as the natural cultural sciences, religious beliefs as well as political ideas, all of which differ in their pattern of historical change. The distinction between objective knowledge and socio-historical dynamics was stressed even by so outstanding an "historicist" as Karl Marx, and the Anglo-Saxon thinkers, from Bacon and Hume to our contemporaries, are inclined to say that moral and political value-judgments are incapable of being either true or false, since they are not assertions about matters of fact but directives of feeling and action. If we bear this difference in mind, we can hardly find any self-contradiction in the statement that there are no absolute values.

No less objectionable are the methods used by Strauss in his futile

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attempt to overcome the distinction between fact and value so as to save the idea of natural right. Thus he does not even mention the numerous and often very penetrating refutations of that idea by Kantian and positivistic philosophers. Instead he attacks Max Weber, who never explicitly criticized the traditions of natural law. Hence all that Strauss can show is that Weber was rather inconsistent in the use of his own principle of *Wertfreiheit* (value-neutrality). In asserting that every sociology necessarily implies some evaluations Strauss is right, to be sure, but only insofar as our everyday language is deeply imbued with evaluative connotations and therefore it is sometimes very difficult to find neutral expressions. But to grant that it is not always possible to draw clear boundaries in our historical and sociological knowledge is very far from proving that there is no decisive difference between fact and value and that absolute values actually exist.

Strauss becomes wholly the victim of logical fallacies and dogmatic presuppositions when he expounds the principles of the Platonic and Aristotelian doctrine of natural right. He believes that these principles are still valid and that they have been blurred by modern heresies. The emergence of the idea of natural law, he remarks quite correctly, is deeply connected with the strains and insecurities of social change. Only when the established order is shaken does the need arise for an authority capable of deciding between two or more conflicting views about the essence of the just or the best society. But can human cognition constitute itself as such an authority? The answer is no—in spite of the most sincere efforts on the part of many outstanding philosophers during more than two millennia. Since the later decades of the nineteenth century it has been shown by thinkers like Henry Sidgwick, Vilfredo Pareto, Hans Kelsen and others, that the alleged principles of natural right or, what is the same, absolute justice are mere tautologies and other empty formulae, which can be employed to "justify" any existing or desired legal and moral order. Moreover, their emptiness makes them ideally suitable for use as a mask for the most resolute power-politics, though they may also hide profound uncertainty and uneasiness concerning moral standards and political action.

Strauss is too intelligent and sensitive not at least to feel these difficulties. He is apparently unwilling, however, to face them squarely or to bring them to the full awareness of the reader, since to do so would lead to the collapse of his entire system. His chapter on classic natural right thus turns into one of the most comprehensive collections of the diverse fallacies to which this type of discourse is open. The fallacies are frequently so clearly formulated and lie so near to the surface that it is hard to understand how the author could have over-

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looked them. As Pareto pointed out, one of the principal ways in which sham proofs enter into the argument for natural right is the definition of one unknown by another. Strauss unwittingly provides some choice illustrations of Pareto's observation. E.g., he defines the "common good" by the "understanding of the whole" or by the "hierarchic order of man's natural constitution," and these again he defines by the "natural order of the wants," which in turn is defined by the "perfection of man's nature," the "natural inclinations," etc., etc. Sensing that there is something wrong here and that such formulae are not entirely unambiguous, Strauss admits they need an interpretation by the most "unbiased and competent, i.e., not morally obtuse men," maintaining that "the best regime is the object of the wish or prayer of all good men." But these expressions are as empty as the others, because any judgment of the moral qualities of a man already presupposes the ethical standards in question. Another variety of the same device, used by the author, is the shift of the problem from one level to another and leaving it there unanswered. Finally Strauss concedes that there are no universally valid rules of action, only a "universally valid hierarchy of ends." What these ends are remains as mysterious at the end of the chapter as at the beginning.

More satisfactory are the two chapters that follow on the decomposition of the classic doctrine of natural right from Hobbes to Burke. But even as an historical account the book is left far behind by the most recent German publication, *Naturrecht und materiale Gerechtigkeit* by Hans Welzel, who is well aware of the circular reasonings and empty or question-begging formulae so widespread in traditional legal and moral doctrine.

The most important and revealing question to ask of any book claiming to give a valid idea of natural right relates to its practical outlook. Now, in asking such a question, we usually find that in most cases the alleged principles of absolute justice are easily identifiable as the ideals, aims and interests of a certain social group or political movement, e.g., liberalism, fascism, communism. But sometimes the political conclusions are less palpable. That is the case here. On the first page Strauss pays lip-service to the Constitution and the right of man to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; but very soon he declares that this kind of natural right gave rise to what he calls liberal relativism and modern nihilism. Obviously he prefers another type of natural right, the practical consequences of which cannot be easily defined. Strauss gives only one piece of practical advice: the true statesman in the Aristotelian sense should take his bearings by the normal situation and by what is normally right and that he should only reluctantly de-

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viate from it in order to save the cause of justice and humanity itself. From the logical standpoint this is scarcely satisfactory; there is no evidence that every "normal"—obviously meaning "established" or "customary"—order is generally just (the regime of Hitler was also well-established), nor are we told what justice permits such deviations.

Politically this one sentence as well as the book as a whole typifies an attitude which seems to be prevailing more and more in this country. It would be incorrect to call this trend conservative, since the real conservative defends certain patterns of life which he values for other reasons than their mere existence. The new trend I am speaking of is inspired by a general feeling of fear, uneasiness and distrust of the future rather than by positive aims. If we compare this conservatism by embarrassment with the vigorous conservative thought of the past century (consider Strauss in relation to men like Bonald, de Maistre and Donoso Cortés) the pitiful weakness of the neo-obscurantism of this period becomes all too clear. Neo-obscurantism has no real aims and ideals, and it is incapable of lucid decisions and firm ideological commitments. It lacks the intellectual courage and candor to face the disappointing situation squarely. Moral emptiness is veiled by empty formulae. The alleged campaign against nihilism soon unmasks itself as creeping nihilism.

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# THE HERO AS GENTLEMAN

Here is a critical work with a difference.* It is an intelligent analysis of the novels of Dornford Yates, Buchan and Sapper carried out by a man who, as an uncritical boy, adored these three writers. He still has a warm spot in his heart for them, and his tone remains affectionate even when he is pointing out their worst deficiencies. Moreover he is so steeped in their prose that he discusses them in their own style. It is rather as if Bertie Wooster, having at last reached years of discretion but still speaking the same kind of English, were to lecture on the shortcomings of P. G. Wodehouse's art. We hear the upper-class voice assuring us—quite rightly—that it is almost all a jolly bad show. The effect of this voice is curious. It reminds one of some poem by Betjeman in loving dispraise of a Victorian monument, which is part of us although we are ashamed of it. Very likely the precise quality of this cracked note will be inaudible to later generations, but, in the meantime, it provides an hour or two of rueful fun for those of us who were boys between the two wars. Perhaps it will even help us to accomplish that feat which, the whole world says, is beyond the Englishman's ability, the feat of growing up.

Mr. Usborne remarks in his Introduction that he has limited himself to Yates, Buchan and Sapper because he knows them so well, but that he might, with equal justification, have extended his study to Stevenson, Kipling, Conan Doyle, Anthony Hope, Ian Hay, Edgar Wallace and Dorothy Sayers. I am not sure that he has got this list quite right. His subject, as his title proclaims, is the Gentleman Hero in pseudo-literature. This is the main theme in only one of the seven additional authors he mentions, and two of them at least belong to real literature. I would suggest as a more coherent list, Yates, Buchan, Sapper, Dorothy Sayers, Wodehouse, Evelyn Waugh and Nancy Mitford. It may be objected that two of the authors in my list—Waugh and Miss Mitford—belong to real literature. In spite of their great talents, I am not sure that they do. They are much nearer to literature, of course, than Miss Sayers or Sapper, but both have something of the fundamental non-seriousness of the best-seller. I would say that the range of quality in these seven authors is from rubbish to first-class near-literature, but that their subject is the same, in spite of many surface differences; it is the final incarnation of the English Gentleman. In Yates, Buchan, Sapper

* *Clubland Heroes,* by Richard Usborne. Constable, 15s.

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and Dorothy Sayers we have the positive, entirely reverent, statement; in Wodehouse, Waugh and Nancy Mitford, the negative statement, apparently irreverent, but fundamentally respectful. By declaring his fondness for the first three, Mr. Usborne shows the niceness of his nature. They are the three that any uncomplicated boy would prefer, with—as he grows older—the addition of Miss Mitford, who can describe a lark in the proper spirit. She is a traitor, of course; she bolted to France and went in for a type of French Gentleman, but the French parts of her books are mercifully unreal. England triumphs, in spite of Miss Mitford's perverseness. No schoolboy, however, could like Lord Peter Wimsey. His suite in the Albany (or is it "in Albany"?), his thick carpets, his first editions, were not described with the right kind of ease and he boasted a plaintive soul. We suspected him of having been invented by his butler and the little swots amongst us noticed that the French of his *entourage* was sometimes incorrect. Nor could any schoolboy be really happy with Wodehouse; Wooster is too much the aristocratic ass and Jeeves is a cardboard Figaro without the humanity of his great original. As for Waugh, he presents us with a completely decadent gentleman who, at first, is convincingly unreliable about money and women and then, alas, becomes pompous about wine and Catholicism—a gentleman who is half in real literature and half out of it, and cannot therefore be enjoyed on either level. Yates, Buchan and Sapper are not ambiguous in this way. Their work is—basically—healthy, and sometimes very clever, nonsense, in which adventure is the main element. The only one I know well is Buchan, but Mr. Usborne quotes liberally from all three. He claims that they did more to shape his personality than the accepted great writers, and he implies that they were the really formative influences on the whole of his generation. There is probably more truth in this than at first appears. One can imagine sincere and interested readers of Eliot, D. H. Lawrence, E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf who, as soon as they closed these authors, fell back on to the values of Yates, Buchan and Sapper, or on to the similar but rather more complex systems of Sayers, Wodehouse, Waugh and Mitford. One may even wonder at times whether the good writers themselves do not, in their weaker moments, fall back on to conventional values. It would not be fantastic, for instance, to work out an Eliot/Sayers/Buchan relationship or another between Lawrence and Nancy Mitford. The importance of Yates, Buchan and Sapper lies in the fact that they presented the simplest and rosiest picture of the Gentleman in his last phase. They have hardly any of the uneasiness which can be felt in the other writers mentioned, although the Idea of Evil is always hovering in various symbolic forms at the back of their works, because, of course, there can be no adventure without a sense of evil.

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They offered us a dream world which had sufficient connection with reality to be, in a boy's eyes, convincing. It has the attractive vulgarity of the end of an aristocratic tradition adapted to upper-middle-class needs. The Hero is, to begin with, a man of means. Usually, the source of his income is not mentioned. He is rich because it is natural for the gentleman to be so. He also leads a natural life between his country estate or estates and his house and clubs in town. In some few cases, he earns his money in business or at the bar, but the process of earning does not enter into the story. Buchan's main hero, Hannay, had 'made his pile' in South Africa before any of his adventures happened to him. The barristers or businessmen we see only in their clubs, at week ends, or on holiday, when they cease to be workers and become town-and-country gentlemen. They then lead the good life, which consists of comfort, food and pleasant exercise. Food, especially; Fortnum and Mason's is a name to conjure with; in some of these books it has the magic resonance that Proust ascribes to Guermantes and Parma. I remember reading Buchan during the General Strike as a hungry man dreams of beefsteaks. He provided a sort of dramatization of the advertisements in *Punch*. That is probably one of the least vicious aspects of this phony writing. The material enjoyment of life is an art, and a preoccupation with good food and drink is a basic virtue to be found in Buchan, Wodehouse, Mitford and Waugh. One should either have luscious plenty, such as they assume to be right, or pure and conscious asceticism. The artistic opposite of a rich meal is black bread and pulses, not bad food, the swallowing of which is humiliating and demoralizing. Similarly, the opposite of 'gracious living' is clean-swept poverty, so that Buchan's characters can move easily between a country house and a shepherd's cottage, but do not go to "obscure addresses in Maida Vale," except, of course, when chasing wickedness. Having lived at such addresses myself for years, without the consolations of wickedness, I can see the point. Feudalism, even in its very last semi-middle-class form, provided a coherent relationship between greatness and simplicity, between decoration and nudity. Vulgarity only crept in when recipes were quoted, vintages mentioned and the lay-out of the morning room too lovingly described. One had, of course, to overlook the all-pervading vulgarity of the silence about money-earning in a society which had come to be based almost entirely on money. But that was exactly the sort of thing that young readers, without being vulgar themselves, would naturally overlook.

The Buchan/Yates/Sapper gentleman, fortified with excellent food and drink, pink through regular exercise and shining from his daily bath, had many good qualities. He retained, in particular, the aristocratic

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conviction that the world was his province. Firmly rooted in his club, his county and his nation, he put his courage and resourcefulness at the service of Right, that is of the English cause, which always happened to be identical with that of the sounder elements abroad. This led to many delightful dream sequences, in which the Gentleman, far from being insular and hidebound, dashed across foreign landscapes, gabbled strange tongues in distant bazaars and thought nothing of studying some branch of Oriental philosophy in order to outwit the villain. Buchan is exceptionally good at this mixture of exoticism and pseudo-intellectualism. I wonder how many people set about learning Russian, as I did, partly because it was the language of the Revolution and therefore had an obvious interest for anyone who had seen the General Strike from underneath, and partly because it occurred in *Huntingtower,* which I thought a splendid story, although all my sympathies were with the principal Bolshevik villain—a Jewish hunchback, if I remember rightly. Buchan was acceptable because he did not put forward too coarse a version of the Imperial myth. In origin not a true Gentleman himself, he had a marked sympathy for the less important races, whom he somehow presented as existing in their own right. It has been said that he annexed the Middle East to St. James's. This is true, but he did it in the correct, sporting fashion. The Middle East was full of jolly good fellows—gentlemen with rather darker skins, in fact—and there was no greater fun than helping them to stamp out the unpleasantness that occurred from time to time within their borders. I feel that Yates and Sapper are not quite so broadminded. From the account that Mr. Usborne gives, it would seem that they leave almost everything to the Englishman, who simply uses 'abroad' as a theater for his miraculous exploits. Buchan's heroes are miraculous, too; they can always remember the native language or the bit of back-woodsmanship that will get them out of each particular scrape; but their 'abroad,' even when quite imaginary, is full of solid, attractive figures. They are the true heirs of all the aristocratic adventurers of the past, tainted at most with slight anti-Semitism.

The assumption in all these books is that England is a base or starting point. The Gentleman is always traveling, exploring or roughing it. He may even live abroad for long stretches at Pau or Dinan, or on the shores of the Caspian or in the mountains of South America. He will buy an island in the Hebrides or build himself a house in Greece or on the high African plateaux. The best-sellers have, in a more easily assimilable form, something of the interest of *Eothen, Travels in Arabia Deserta, The Bible in Spain, The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* or of the dozens of other good English books in this tradition. I do not think there is any other literature which ranges so naturally over the whole

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of the globe. The French, for instance, have a popular *littérature des wagons-lits,* some sentimental adventure stories about North Africa and the Middle East, and some genuine literature, such as Malraux's novels, Père Huc's superb *Travels in Tartary,* Rimbaud's poetic fragments and Gide's African diaries, but in all of them the tone is quite different. There is never the sheer thrill of being abroad, which is the fundamental English emotion. Frenchmen never seem to be abroad in quite the same way. They tend to carry their intellectual universe with them. The Englishman may miss his hot bath and his early morning tea, but if he belongs to, or has adopted, the genuine aristocratic tradition (Waugh is outside it; bad temper undoes him as it undoes Smollett), he takes a childlike pleasure in going dirty and in drinking fermented mare's milk. The best type of Hero in the pseudo-literary best-sellers, like the best type of genuine English traveler, accepted the variety of the world, while retaining a simple belief in Right and Wrong.

When the Gentleman was back at base, his behavior continued to be, in several respects, most praiseworthy. He treated the lower classes at least as well as he treated his livestock, which is saying a great deal. He was a sworn enemy of the Left, of course, but what else could be expected in those days? His servants were faithful, and that is the best testimonial any master can have. Buchan, Yates and Sapper are almost impeccable in this respect. Wodehouse is sound enough too; Jeeves has the right attitude; he is not a genuine Figaro, although he occasionally diddles his master. Waugh passes muster in both the early and the later books. Only the women break the unwritten rules. Miss Sayers allows Lord Peter's valet to put the lower classes in their place during a public-house conversation, and one of Miss Mitford's books has a dreadful episode in which Lady So-and-So (the character, being a woman, is not absolutely pukka) remarks how nice it is to drive along in a warm Daimler and watch the lower orders trudging through the snow. The men are never as cynical, and they genuinely like their fellow Englishmen; even Mr. Waugh likes Cockneys. Again Buchan is perhaps the writer who shows up best on this score; he can draw an almost convincing grocer and an Ernie Bevin type of trade union official, and his Gentlemen-Statesmen are all working for the good of the country, so hard, indeed, that—as Mr. Usborne remarks—they often bring themselves to the verge of nervous breakdowns. It is true that an unpleasant partisan spirit was to appear in the later books of Dornford Yates and Waugh, but, in the heyday of the Gentleman, the England of the best-sellers must have been quite a pleasant place to live in, even for the denizens of Maida Vale, if they accepted their hopeless position in a proper spirit of cheerful humility.

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The Gentleman had, of course, his darker side, which Mr. Usborne touches on firmly but discreetly. He had a tendency to take the law into his own hands. This characteristic, very flattering to the ego of the individual reader, he shares to some extent with the usual detective story hero. They differ, however, in that the private detective, having shown himself to be superior to the official agents of the law, usually hands the criminal over to them in the last chapter. He is the avenging angel, the "saint," the inquisitor; they are his "secular arm." Lord Peter falls into this category, but he is given the unusual distinction of remorse when the criminal is hanged. Buchan, Yates and Sapper, however, tend to dispose of their villains without the help of the law. Mr. Usborne suggests that they are carrying over into adult life the rough and ready justice administered by prefects in public schools. This may well be so, in spite of the fact that Buchan was not a public-school boy; he displayed such an ability to assimilate the gentlemanly ethos that he may have absorbed this too. It is perhaps, like so many other public-school characteristics, an old aristocratic freedom adapted to upper-middle-class tastes. Whatever the explanation, the Gentleman Hero thought nothing of engaging in single combat with the villain (whom he treated at the same time with due respect) or even of hanging the villain's henchmen on his own initiative. Such private enterprise could easily—and, in fact, does at times in the works of Yates and Sapper—degenerate into proto-fascism. The term is all the more justified since anti-Semitism is latent in Buchan and overt in Yates and Sapper. The forces of Evil are not sound foreigners, rooted in their own soil, but cosmopolitan adventurers who are disrupting the *status quo* through sheer devilishness. (Strangely enough, a few years later Buchan's Bolshevik villain, in his turn, was to become a Soviet gentleman with a Buchan-like detestation of Jewish cosmopolitans.) It is true, however, that the most forceful of these villains in the end appear attractive, because the hero has to have an adversary worthy of him. Carl Petersen is an essential counterpart to Drummond, and in Buchan's *Three Hostages,* for instance, Medina is the best character; he is even credited with loyalty "to his own people," who seem to be the Erse-speaking Irish. One gets the impression, nevertheless, that Jews are working for him. Perhaps he is meant to be a kind of Irish Jew.

If one went still further and had the Gentleman psychoanalyzed, the most distressing things might come to light. In Yates and Sapper, anti-Semitism is probably the most alarming feature. Their treatment of sex seems quite straightforward; Yates, in particular, appears to give an attractive picture of married life, although the absence of children may have some dreadful significance. Buchan, according to Mr. Us-

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borne, shows signs of masochism and homosexuality. The first charge is justified, I think, but the second is perhaps a concession to a fashionable craze. If anything, Buchan's heroes are undersexed; they marry late, on the whole, or remain rather wistful bachelors. But it would be interesting to see what a psychiatrist made of the strange gods and pagan rites which figure in so many of his stories. Are they an inheritance from Kipling, that rather tragic, would-be Gentleman with one foot in the jungle? Or do they reflect old heathen stirrings in the Lowlands, beneath the grim surface of the Church of Scotland? And what would the psychiatrist make of Wodehouse's insect-like creatures, living in a servant-organized, aunt-ridden, damsel-haunted world? We can guess what he would say about Lord Peter Wimsey. We can imagine, too, his comments on Mr. Waugh's young bounders and on the "narrow loins" which were so startlingly "made free of" in *Brideshead Revisited*. And he would cluck with Continental sympathy when Miss Mitford transfers her search for masculine prowess from England to France. Clearly the English gentleman, in his last incarnation, did not carry his heroism into the bedroom. His unworthy brother, the intellectual, out-distanced him in this. D. H. Lawrence had no doubt some justification in contrasting him unfavorably with his gamekeeper.

Buchan, Yates, Sapper and Miss Sayers show us the Gentleman in all his glory; Wodehouse, Waugh and Miss Mitford poke fun at him for his fecklessness, the various expedients to which he is reduced, and his eccentricity, but at the same time they imply that there is no better life than his. Waugh would like to bring Catholicism into it, yet his is not a new departure; we are to think of it as a return to an epoch when the Gentleman was even more truly himself. On the whole, however, religion and art are not to the forefront in this kind of writing. It is taken for granted that the Gentleman is a Christian, and he does not, as a rule, bother to define his beliefs. He may have a faint respect for art, but there is no suggestion that art is a vital matter. His concern is leading the Good Life between club and country house, traveling, risking his skin in the service of his country and his country's friends, comradeship and occasional dabbling in politics. His main virtues are good manners, courage, dash and patriotism. It is significant that even Waugh's young bounders behaved well when the war became serious. Only Bertie Wooster missed his cue through playing the ass a shade too long; he has now got over this lapse by explaining intelligently what an ass he was.

Have we to conclude, then, that the enormous popularity of these authors between the two wars was a good sign? They certainly encouraged initiative and bravery. No doubt many people who fought

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in the Spanish War, or were dropped behind enemy lines in Europe or the Balkans, or simply stood up to the bombing in England, imagined themselves as Buchan heroes and were all the better for it, provided they could develop a sense of reality, while retaining their dynamic romanticism. For a sense of hard reality is missing from all these books, even, I think, from Waugh. These popular English writers are astonishingly innocent. Even Buchan, who spent a lifetime in politics and 'great affairs', has no conception of the real stresses in society, or if he has, he is not honest in his books. His characters are animated waxworks, and when one tries to reread him after seeing the inside of London clubs, struggling with foreign languages and traveling outside England, one wonders how one ever tolerated his stifling Madame Tussaud-like atmosphere. Pseudo-literature has a good effect only if one outgrows it. Mr. Usborne defines the difficulty on the political level very nicely:

> When I was a boy and after I had grown out of imputing omnipotence to all grownups, I transferred my trust to the infallible English heroes of the English thrillers I read. . . . I was building up to a letdown, of course. . . . I wish it weren't so. I wish I could accept the appearance of Flying Saucers, and the disappearance of diplomats, as problems in space, without my thinking that surely some Hannay will be forthcoming to get the answers. Won't Arbuthnot settle the troubles in Malaya, Maitland the troubles in Kenya? Why didn't Drummond go and do something about Pontecorvo? Couldn't Jonah Mansel have found the Coronation Stone in a matter of days rather than distressing months?

The reply is No, and we have, in consequence, to discard the old idea of the Gentleman. He himself, now that he is on the point of growing up, can see that he is impossible. His mildness has allowed the development of the Welfare State; the Empire he took for granted has turned into a Commonwealth; therefore, his natural habitat has been transformed and the world is no longer to the same extent his province. It is true that he clings with surprising vigor to his old habits; champagne still flows in Mayfair, on expense accounts, and the *Sketch* and the *Tatler* still find faces to photograph. But it is high time we were offered, in both bad and good literature, some new ideal—*un gentleman mitigé mais encore reconnaissable,* who can maintain dash and good manners on a thousand a year in a semi-detached villa, who has assimilated Freud and Marx, who has made up his mind to be a humanitarian agnostic, who has the right attitude to Europe as well as to America, and who really knows what to do with the Colonies.

**J. G. Weightman**

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